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ABSTRACT

This action research project described a program for improving reading skills in the identified primary classrooms. The targeted population consisted of students in first and third grades. The third grade classrooms were located in a low socioeconomic area within an urban community of Illinois. The first grade classroom was located in a higher socioeconomic area within the same community. The problem of ineffective reading skills was documented through data compiled by the teacher-researchers through the use of the Developmental Reading Assessment. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students lack literacy experiences at home and a lack of motivation, which directly relates to students feelings and attitudes towards reading. Additional probable causes included poor fluency, a lack of reading strategies, and a deficit in phonological processing. A need for a literacy-rich classroom environment with a framework that encompasses essential reading components for student success was revealed. A review of various solution strategies suggested by those knowledgeable in the field of education, combined with an analysis of the targeted settings, resulted in the selection of a four-block reading intervention. The intervention consisted of: (1) the teacher explained, demonstrated, and supported reading strategies with the students; (2) the teacher reinforced reading and spelling patterns through instructional activities; (3) students self-selected and responded to literature experiences; (4) the teacher described, modeled, and supported writing activities with the students. The balanced, comprehensive approach helped children become more skilled in all areas in literacy, as well as increase levels of motivation and confidence. Post intervention data indicate improvements in reading skills. By immersing the students in a literacy-rich environment, reading abilities were enhanced. Appendixes contain word lists, student reading conference questions, a researchers' weekly journal form, a permission letter, and six learning activities. (Contains 32 references and 15 figures.) (Author/RS)

IMPROVING READING ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH THE USE OF A BALANCED LITERACY PROGRAM

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This action research project described a program for improving reading skills in the identified primary classrooms. The targeted population consisted of students in first and third grades. The third grade classrooms were located in a low socioeconomic area within an urban community of Illinois. The first grade classroom was located in a higher socioeconomic area within the same community.

The problem of ineffective reading skills was documented through data compiled by the teacher-researchers through the use of the Developmental Reading Assessment.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students lack literacy experiences at home and a lack of motivation, which directly relates to students feelings and attitudes towards reading. Additional probable causes included poor fluency, a lack of reading strategies, and a deficit in phonological-processing. A need for a literacy-rich classroom environment with a framework that encompasses essential reading components for student success was revealed.

A review of various solution strategies suggested by those knowledgeable in the field of education, combined with an analysis of the targeted settings, resulted in the selection of a four-block reading intervention. The intervention consisted of:

1. The teacher explained, demonstrated, and supported reading strategies with the students.
2. The teacher reinforced reading and spelling patterns through instructional activities.
3. Students self-selected and responded to literature experiences.
4. The teacher described, modeled, and supported writing activities with the students.

The balanced, comprehensive approach helped children become more skilled in all areas in literacy, as well as increase levels of motivation and confidence. Post intervention data indicate improvements in reading skills. By immersing the students in a literacy-rich environment, reading abilities were enhanced.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted first and third grades exhibited ineffective reading skills that included minimal reading strategies and a lack of reading comprehension skills. Evidence for the existence of the problem included Developmental Reading Assessment scores, which measures a student's accuracy rate, comprehension level, and phrasing and fluency rate.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project was conducted by three teachers/researchers. Site A was conducted in a parochial Kindergarten through eighth grade school at the first grade level. Site B was conducted at a primary school at the third grade level. Site C was conducted at a primary school at the third grade level.

Site A – Local Setting

The students were predominantly Caucasian with Asian, African-American, and Hispanic backgrounds represented by approximately 3% of the student population. Site A was a parochial school in a Midwest community. The students came from the immediate area as well as several surrounding communities. There were 478 students in the grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The average number of students per classroom was 26. Ninety-nine percent of the

students were affiliated with the religious community. The population at this school remained stable, as there was minimal fluctuation of the student body. This site did not experience chronic attendance problems. While truancies were nonexistent, tardiness, detentions, and suspensions were of minimal frequency at Site A. The socioeconomic backgrounds of the students were varied. The majority of the student body was upper-middle class or middle class. About 17% of the students at this site qualified for free or reduced lunches. The percentage of students who lived with both parents was 88%. The percentage of students who lived with one parent was 5%. The percentage of students whose parents lived in separate households was 7%. About 95% of the students at this site go on to the single parochial high school located in the area. Students at this site followed a uniform dress code on a daily basis.

There were 26 total staff members; 20 were grade level or subject teachers. The remaining staff consisted of a collaborative teacher, two physical education teachers, a music teacher, a technology coordinator, and a student advisor. In addition, a part time Title I teacher worked with students who demonstrated a need in the area of reading. Nearly all of the staff members were lay teachers as there was one religion teacher. The teaching staff was made up of all Caucasian females. Fifty-five percent of the staff had 15 years or more experience. Four of the teachers held a master's degree while three of the teachers were progressing towards a master's degree. A principal, a secretary, one full-time office assistant, one part-time office assistant, and a records manager performed operating and administrative duties. The student advisor met and became acquainted with all students through scheduled "friendly visits." The student advisor also provided counseling to students who demonstrated a need or concern. Teachers and administration at this site communicated regularly with parents through telephone conversations, quarterly report cards, mid-semester progress reports, formal and informal

parent/teacher conferences, class newsletters, and school newsletters. A school directory was made available to all families, which contained phone numbers of the students, class lists, teaching staff list, a school calendar, education commission members, PTO board members, room representatives, and special coordinators. The school's mission statement was communicated to the students and parents on the school report card. It confirmed the school's commitment to providing quality religious education for parish and non-parish students in the kindergarten through eighth grades.

Site A was a regular division classroom with 26 students, one classroom teacher, and one full time assistant. It was located on the lower level at the end of the hall of an all brick, two-story building constructed in 1953. An addition was completed in 1995, which consisted of a library, technology center, junior high classrooms, gymnasium, and cafeteria with a full kitchen. In the classroom, student desks were arranged in a U-shape with a smaller U-shape in the middle. There was a leveled-library categorized by subject in the classroom. Reading charts and a word wall were in students' view. One carpeted area was used for sustained silent reading and other group activities. Five computers were available for student use, one of which had Internet access. The other four were equipped with the Accelerated Reader program and other educational games.

Students at Site A were instructed in math, reading, spelling, writing, phonics, religion, science, handwriting, social studies, art, with specialized instruction offered in physical education, music, library and computers. Students attended church once a month with the entire school and twice a month with their individual grade level. Students needing additional practice in the area of reading met with the collaborative teacher four times a week for approximately 15 minutes.

Students at Site A participated on school soccer teams coached by parent volunteers. Students had other opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities such as band, computer club, chess club, drama club, choir, student council, spelling bee, speech, basketball, volleyball, and scholastic bowl. Many of the eighth-grade students participated in French or Spanish instruction four days a week at the parochial high school. This instruction was offered to younger grade levels as well. Students had opportunities to participate in Brownies and Cub Scouts, which the parents managed. Students at this school participated in community service projects such as donating items to local shelters or organizations and writing to Parish shut-ins.

Students and faculty were supported by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The PTO provided a school-wide fine arts day and monthly picture person programs at all grade levels. They also provided additional funding for teachers and other classroom needs. Parent support was evident as they assisted in the school library, class field trips, the Accelerated Reader program, and classroom parties. Parents also volunteered to assist classroom teachers with special projects or purchase items needed to do a project.

Tuition was based on a family's parish affiliation and the total number of student enrollment. The 2001-2002 family tuition rates for parishioners ranged from \$2,000 to \$3,000 depending on the number of children who were enrolled. The cost for a non-parishioner was slightly higher. The average expenditure per pupil for the 2001-2002 school year was \$2,578. Parish contributions covered all expenditures beyond the collected tuition.

Site B – Local Setting

The staff at Site B consisted of 12% male and 88% female teachers. The staff was 83% Caucasian, 15% African American and 2% Hispanic. The majority of the staff was employed

full-time while 17% was employed part-time. According to the 2001 School Report Card, the average class in the third grade at Site B was 18. The pupil-teacher ratio in the district was 18 to

The students at Site B were 81% African-American, 10% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and .3% Asian Pacific. The total enrollment was 343 students. The percentage of low-income students was 99%. The percentage of Limited English Proficient students was 6%. Site B had an attendance rate of 93%, with 40% student mobility and 8% of the students were chronically truant.

The staff at Site B included a Principal, Lead Teacher, Home-School Facilitator, Truancy Officer, two Counselors from a local Children's Home, Social Worker, Psychologist, Librarian, two Custodians, Secretary, Teachers, and Teacher Assistants. Teachers and administration at this site communicated regularly with parents through home visits, telephone conversations, monthly notes home, quarterly report cards, mid-semester progress reports, formal and informal parent/teacher conferences, and school newsletters.

Students at Site B had opportunities to participate in many community sponsored extra-curricular programs such as Orchestra, 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Positive Attitudes Change Everything Successfully, and Peer Mediators. The district provided funds for an after school program centered on an interactive electronic game system that targets mathematics and language arts. Through a local church in Site B's community, an after school drama club, chorus, and artwork program had been established. Some parents participated in a Family Leadership Program and attended family literacy and math events. Other organizations that assisted with needs at Site B were a local restaurant franchise, a department store, local realtor, a neighboring church, and the Tri-County Urban League.

Site B was the oldest of the 14 primary schools in the district. The historical building was built in 1898 and is currently listed as architecturally significant. The "Historical Building" housed the second through fourth grades, the school office, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library. In 1960 a modern addition was added adjacent to the historical building. The "New Building" housed the pre-kindergarten through first grade classrooms, a Reading Lab and the Teacher Resource Library. The third grade classroom used in this study was housed in the "Historical Building" on the second floor.

At Site B the students received departmentalized instruction in the areas of mathematics, writing and language arts, and reading and spelling. Specialized instruction is offered in science and social studies, art, physical education and technology. The Reading Excellence Act Grant influenced instruction at Site B.

Site C - Local Setting

Site C was a public school in a metropolitan community of approximately 113,595 with a 94% attendance rate. The mobility rate of the students at Site C was 45% and the truancy rate was 4%. There were 498 students in kindergarten through the fourth grades. The students at this site consist of 80% African-American, 18% Caucasian, 1% Hispanic, 1% Asian Pacific.

On site there were 39 teachers that consisted of 20 grade level teachers, a lead teacher, a physical education teacher, a music teacher, an orchestra teacher, two part-time computer teachers, and a behavior support teacher, a full-time speech pathologist, a part-time speech pathologist, four special education teachers, two reading specialists, a resource teacher, a science teacher, a phonemic awareness teacher, a library manager, and an attendance liaison. Teachers and administration at this site communicated regularly with parents through telephone

conversations, quarterly reports, report cards, mid-semester progress reports, formal and informal teacher-parent conferences, class newsletters, and school newsletters.

The teaching staff was made up of 90% females and 10% male. The number of teachers with a master's degree was 10, with 6 teachers working towards a master's. A principal, assistant principal, a part-time clerk, and a full time secretary performed operating and administrative duties.

The school building consisted of a four level structure composed of a library, computer lab, reading lab, science lab, music room, resource room, and a gymnasium. Site C was a regular division classroom with 19 students and one classroom teacher. The room had four internet accessible computers for students, with Accelerated Reading, and Scholastic's Reading Counts programs available for students. The word wall, along with pocket charts were used for word building and writing activities. One carpeted area was used for read alouds, class meetings, and easel displays.

Instruction at Site C included language arts, social studies, science, math, art, handwriting, spelling, and writing. Students were pulled for tutoring in reading and phonemic awareness for 30-minute sessions.

On the reading portion of the 2001 Illinois Standards Achievement Test, 9% of students were in the academic warning level. 59% were in the below standards level. 29% were in the meets level, and 3% exceeded standards. On the math portion 14% were in the academic warning level, 42% were in the below standards level, 36% were in the meets level, and 8% were in the exceeds standard level. On the writing portion 13% were in the academic warning level, 45% were in the below standard level, and 42% were in meets level, and 0% were in the exceeds

level. The percent of students meeting or exceeding standards were 32% in reading, 44% in math, and 42% in writing.

After school programs included: Reading Fun, Phonemic Awareness, Maps and Graphs, Language Arts Fun, Young Authors Club, Working With Words, Explorers, K-4 Science, and Student Council. Two latch key programs offered activities to improve self-esteem and academic achievement. Girl Scouts and 4-H club were available. The school purchased Lightspan computer play stations and computer games that featured language arts, reading and math games. Gifted programs offered enrichment in computers and science.

Due to a low-income population, the school received Title I funding to support the school with additional staff, materials, and resources. The Reading Excellence Act offered the school funding to staff two reading specialists in the reading lab with additional computers, reading games, tutoring, and one on one intervention for at risk students. A Target liaison was on staff to work with families with chronic attendance problems. Partners in Parent Involvement offered support for improving oral expression, and reading by supplying materials and games. They also supplied materials for parent involvement activities such as Doughnuts with Dad, Muffins with Mom, and Make It-Take It Nights. A Parent Teacher Organization worked to encourage increased parent involvement. Adopt -A-School Partners in the community offered support. Other organizations that supported the school are a local restaurant, a neighborhood church, the Humane Society, a health education facility, and the local symphony.

The Surrounding Community

Sites A, B, and C were located in a metropolitan area with a population of 113,595 and land area of approximately 41 square miles. The number of persons per square mile was 2,770. The population of this area had changed less than 10% in the last ten years. Approximately 25%

of the population was under 18 years old. The ethnic make-up was 76% Caucasian, 20% African American, 0.2% American Indian, 2.6 % Asian Pacific Islanders, and 2.9% Hispanic. Eighty percent were high school graduates and 18% were college graduates. The homeownership rate was 54%. The median household income was \$37,840; 13.5% were below poverty level.

There were three major health facilities in this area with two of the hospitals in the top three major employers in the community. The educational institutions included the public school districts, the private school sector, two community colleges, one university, one medical school, and two nursing schools. The world's largest manufacturer of earth moving equipment that was headquartered in the area employed 15% of the population.

The community facilities available were a vast number of churches of many faiths, motels/hotels, public golf courses, public tennis courts, and access to the nearby river provided recreational opportunities such as boating, fishing, and other water related activities. Some of the fine arts programs available in the community included theater, ballet, and opera. This community offered two professional sports teams, a museum of arts and science, a zoo, a planetarium, and an array of riverfront development activities were underway.

Site A was located in the central region of this city. The average home price was \$133,783.76. The median age was 37 years old. The socioeconomic status of this neighborhood included a household income slightly over \$42,600 and a low unemployment rate. Most of the working population was employed in professional or managerial positions. The average home value was above the national average.

Site B was located in the down town area of a metropolitan city. Two of the three major hospitals of the city were within walking distance from the school, along with several churches,

large corporations, and businesses. Site B drew students from a low socio-economic neighborhood, two homeless shelters and two public housing projects.

Sites B and C were located in the east region of the city. The average home price was \$52,946. The median age was 34 years old. About 60% of households earned less than \$25,000. The rates of unemployment and poverty were twice the national averages in 22% of the residents. Half of the work force was employed in the manufacturing and service industries. The average home value was 40% below the national average.

Site A – District Context

Site A was one of 46 elementary schools in the diocese. The Diocese covered an area of 16,933 square miles. The Diocesan Office of Education consisted of an administrator, a superintendent of schools, an associate superintendent, an associate superintendent of schools, and a director of religious education.

The 2001-2002 Diocesan Annual Report stated a total of 11,791 students in the elementary grades of which 5,796 were boys and 5,995 were girls. The elementary schools employed 800 full and part-time personnel, including principals. The number of religious teachers was 22 and the number of lay teachers was 778. The report contained no information regarding racial/ethnic backgrounds of the teachers or students, teacher salary, or an average of teacher experience in the diocese.

Site B and C - District Context

Sites B and C were part of a large public school district that serviced 14,910 students. Students from this district consisted of 57% African-American, 39% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian Pacific Islander. There were 14 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, four high schools, and seven special schools. The district employed 1,138 teachers. The average years of

teaching experience were 14.4. The percent of teacher's with a bachelor's degree was 56.3% and with a master's degree and above was 43.6%. The pupil-teacher ratio was 18:1 and the pupil-administrator ratio was 194.1:1. The average teacher salary was \$42,404 and the average administrator salary was \$72,203. The average 1999-2000 operating expenditure per pupil was \$8,086 as compared to the average state operating expense of \$7,483. Total district expenditure for 1999-2000 was \$126,520,941 (2001 School Report Card).

The district administrative structure consisted of a central office and building. The structure of the central office was one superintendent, four assistant superintendents, a director of corporate legislative relations, a director of human relations/personnel, a director of research and evaluation and testing, a director of school community relations, and a controller-treasurer (J. Day, personal communication, February 15, 2002).

National Context of the Problem

Teacher, administrators, parents, and communities have concerns for the future of our nation's readers. Forty percent of all U.S. nine year olds score below the "basic" level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The number of children who are poor readers across the nation is on the rise. "Many adults believe that American school children have fallen behind children in other nations and that illiteracy is rampant across the nation" (Allington 2001, p.1).

The problem of reading ineffectiveness is widely recognized across the country. It is generating substantial concern at the state and national levels. President George W. Bush signed into law on January 8, 2002 the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) stating that by the year 2013-2014 all students will be proficient in reading by the end of the third grade level. The NCLB also states that each year all desegregate groups must make gains five percent or higher in

each content area tested at the state level. If the goals are not achieved, the federal and state agencies monitoring school progress will intervene and offer guidelines for improved student achievement in reading. The consequences for not meeting the standards become more severe as the length of time increases.

Reading is a complex and complicated process, and the reasons for reading difficulties vary. Many teachers are faced each year with great concerns about children who struggle with reading. According to the National Research Council, there are vast numbers of school-aged children from all social classes who demonstrate difficulties in learning to read. Reading ineffectiveness is present in children from low social risk populations who attend well-funded schools, but is much more likely to occur among poor children, among non-white children and among non-native speakers of English. However, "Socioeconomic status does not contribute most directly to reading achievement. Rather, other family characteristics related to context are more explanatory such as academic guidance, attitude towards education, parental aspirations for the child, conversations in the home, reading materials in the home, and cultural activities" (Simmons & Kameeni, 2001, p.53).

Reading is essential in being a life long learner and an interactive member of society. It is prevalent in all facets of society. The importance of adequate literacy skills has long been recognized as essential to academic success and success in society. The ability to read is highly valued and pertinent for social and economic promotion. The consequences of not learning to read well exist in society today as the demands for greater literacy are vastly increasing. The importance of recognizing and monitoring the development of early literacy skills is critical, as reading failure is overwhelming the most significant reason for retention, special education, or

remedial services. According to the California Department of Education (1995), the rationale for teaching children to read effectively includes the following:

Professional educators and the public at large have long known that reading is an enabling skill that traverses academic disciplines and translates into meaningful personal, social, and economic outcomes for individuals. It is common knowledge that reading is the fulcrum of academics, the pivotal ability that stabilizes and leverages children's opportunities to learn and to become reflective, independent learners. Despite society's long recognition of the importance of the success for reading, only recently have we begun to understand the profound and enduring consequences of not learning to read and the new-found evidence of the critical and abbreviated period in which we have to alter reading trajectories (Juel, 1988; Lyon and Chhabra, 1996, p.1).

Today teachers are faced with the immense challenge to meet the needs of all readers regardless of their cultural backgrounds, economic backgrounds, knowledge bases, and learning styles. Teachers, along with parents and communities, must work together to help students achieve in reading. Our children's future is dependent upon their success in reading.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

At sites A, B, and C the examiners presented the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) test to individual students. This test was designed to determine independent reading levels for pre-primer levels through third grade. During individual assessments, the examiner presented three reading selections to each student and asked the student to choose the book that was just right for him or her. After the student made his or her selection the examiner noted whether or not the student gathered pertinent information about the story. While the student read the selection orally, a running record was kept of student miscues and was recorded on the DRA Observation Guide (Appendix A). The examiner counted substitutions, omissions, insertions, and words supplied by the teacher as miscues. The percentage of accuracy was determined by circling the total number of miscues on the available chart. A 94% or above percentage of accuracy was the standard used to determine the appropriateness of the text. If a student fell below this percentage, the test was re-administered at a lower level. Phrasing, fluency, and intonation were rated and recorded on the DRA Observation Guide. Also noted were the strategies students used when faced with difficulty reading the text.

The directions for each test changed from level to level. A level two text consisted of repeated word or sentence pattern with natural language structures. The simple illustrations

included animals and objects familiar to primary children. One line of text appeared on the left hand page, the words were large and well spaced so that the children were able to track as they read. The number of words in the text ranged from 10 to 36. The teacher selected the text and read one or two pages. The child tracked with their finger and read the rest of the story while the teacher took running records of miscues. The teacher asked the child to locate a word or a letter.

Level 3 through 6 texts consisted of simple stories that contained repetitive words, phrases, and actions. The selection consisted predominately of predictable language structures. The stories included characters and experiences that were familiar to primary children. The pictures provided much support to the story. One to three lines of text were placed below a picture. The number of words in the text ranged from 46 to 75.

For levels 3 to 16, the teacher or student selected the text that seemed just right for him or her. The teacher introduced the text; the student looked at the pictures and told what was happening. Students read the complete text aloud. After hearing the student read a couple pages from the text, the examiner determined whether or not the student should continue at this level. The teacher took a running record of the oral reading. The student retold the information read. The teacher asked response questions. It was also noted whether students began to connect events in the stories.

In levels 8 through 14, the stories were about children and problems in which students could relate. Some repetition occurred in these texts and the number of high frequency words increased. The illustrations gave moderate support, provided information about the setting, and suggested the sequence of events. The texts consisted of two to six lines located under the illustrations. The number of words in the text ranged from 86 to 207.

In levels 16 through 28 the characters were either imaginary or animals with human characteristics. The content shifted from personal experiences to comparing and contrasting other stories. Literary language structures were integrated with natural language. There was some description of setting and characters. The text was three to twelve lines above the illustrations on each page. The number of words in these texts started at 266 and increased with each level of difficulty.

For levels 18 to 44, the teacher selected a range of three texts. The student chose one that seemed just right for them. The teacher introduced the text. Students were asked to predict what they thought might happen after listening to an introductory statement, read aloud the beginning paragraph, and flip quickly through the story. The students read the first two to four paragraphs aloud. The students predicted what they thought would happen in the story. The students read the complete text silently in another location. The students retold the stories and shared information from the text. The teacher asked response questions. From levels 28-44, the teacher asked one or two inference questions.

Level 30 had a more complex story that included descriptions of setting, characters, problems, and resolutions in greater detail. Background knowledge and higher level thinking skills were needed to understand and appreciate the humor, the problem, or the suspense in each story as well as the character development. There was minimal picture support, and text size was slightly smaller.

To obtain the DRA level the student read aloud while a record of their oral reading was kept. The reader's phrasing, fluency, intonation, and attention to punctuation, as well as what happened at difficulty, were noted. As the student retold the story the examiner underlined the events in the story overview on the Observation Guide. If the student was prompted to tell more,

that was included in the Observation Guide. Responses were recorded to specific questions to discover what else the student recalled. The DRA Comprehension Rubric was used in the following way to determine the students' comprehension levels. The teacher circled the number next to the statement that best described the students' retelling. The circled numbers were added together to obtain a total score that determined their level of comprehension.

At Sites A, B, and C students' DRA test scores were taken from their DRA Observation Guide. A student's DRA level was determined by acquiring a 94% or above accuracy rate and an "adequate" or "very good" comprehension level. The DRA level is a composite score which tells the students' independent reading level. Scores for each student were recorded on a matrix. Scores were then grouped in ascending order as illustrated below in Figures 1 through 3.

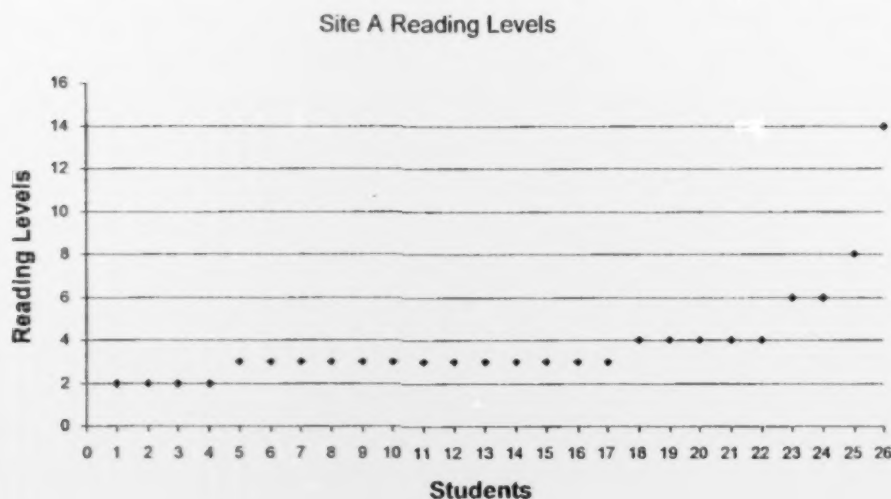


Figure 1. Reading levels for students at Site A as determined by the DRA pre-test. (September, 2002).

At Site A, a first grade classroom, students' DRA test scores ranged from levels 2 to 14. There were four students which scored at level four, thirteen students scored at level three, five

students scored at level four, two students scored at level six, one student scored at level eight, and one student scored at level fourteen. The mean score was level four, the median score was level three, and the mode score was level three. There were six different reading levels achieved out of twenty-six students.

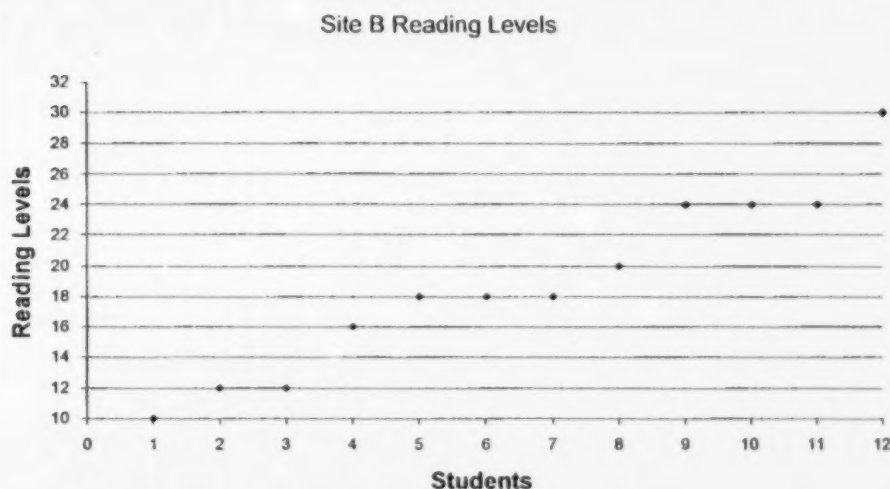


Figure 2. Reading levels for students at Site B as determined by the DRA pre-test. (September, 2002).

At Site B, a third grade classroom, students' DRA test scores ranged from levels ten to thirty. There was one student at level ten, two students at level twelve, two students at level sixteen, three students at level eighteen, one student at level twenty, three students at level twenty-four, and one student at level thirty. The mean score was eighteen, the median score was eighteen, and the mode scores were eighteen and twenty-four. There were seven different reading levels in this classroom out of twelve students. Only twelve out of eighteen students participated in this action research.

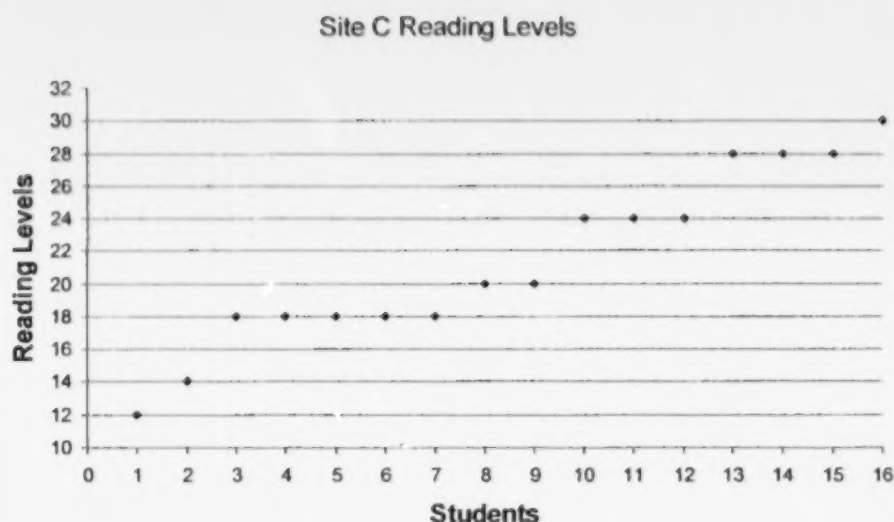


Figure 3. Reading levels for students at Site C as determined by the DRA pre-test. (September, 2002).

At Site C, a third grade classroom, students' DRA test scores ranged from levels twelve to thirty. There was one student which scored at level twelve, one student scored at level fourteen, five students scored at level eighteen, two students scored at level twenty, three students scored at level twenty-four, three students scored at level twenty-eight, and one scored at level thirty. The mean score was twenty-one, the median score was twenty, and the mode was eighteen. There were seven different reading levels achieved. Only sixteen out of nineteen students participated in this action research.

At Sites A, B, and C students' DRA scores were categorized into "above grade level," "at grade level," or "below grade level." The grade levels were determined by the DRA Teacher Resource Guide (Appendix B). The findings are illustrated in Figures 4 through 6.

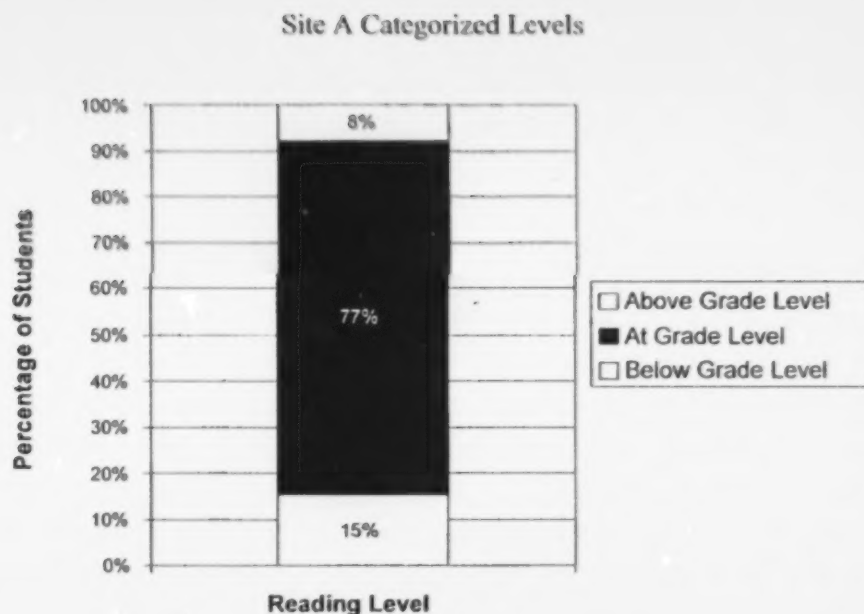


Figure 4. Percentages of students reading above, at, or below grade level according to the DRA pre-test (September 2002).

At site A, a first grade classroom, 8% of the students were “above grade level,” 77% of the students were “at grade level” and 15% of the students were “below grade level.” The students in the “above grade level” range read at levels beyond 8. Students who were “at grade level” read at levels three through six. Students who were “below grade level” read at level two. Two students were reading “above grade level,” twenty students were reading “at grade level,” and four students were “below grade level.”

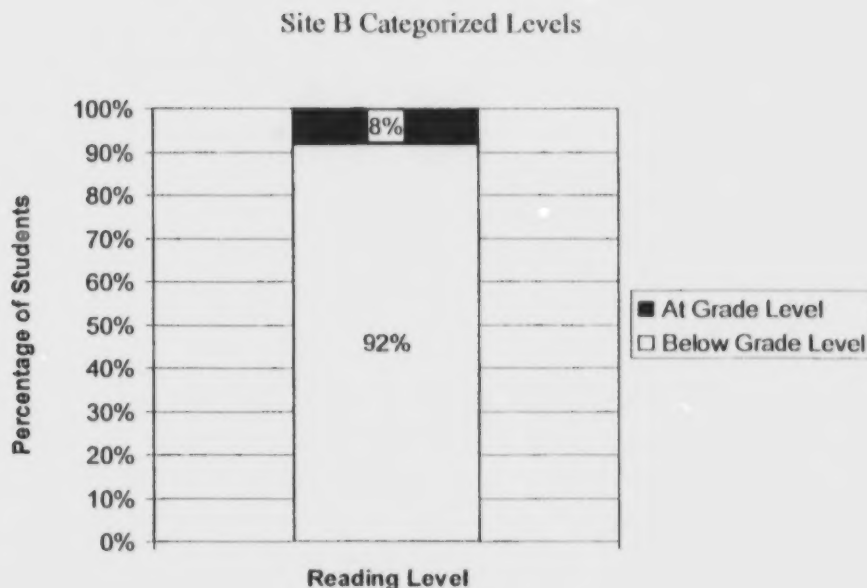


Figure 5. Percentages of students reading above, at, or below grade level according to the DRA pre-test (September 2002).

At site B, a third grade classroom, 8% of the students were “at grade level,” and 92% of the students were below “grade level.” The student considered “at grade level” read at level thirty. The students who were “below grade level” demonstrated independent reading levels of ten through twenty-four. No students read “above grade level,” one student read “at grade level,” and eleven students were reading “below grade level.”

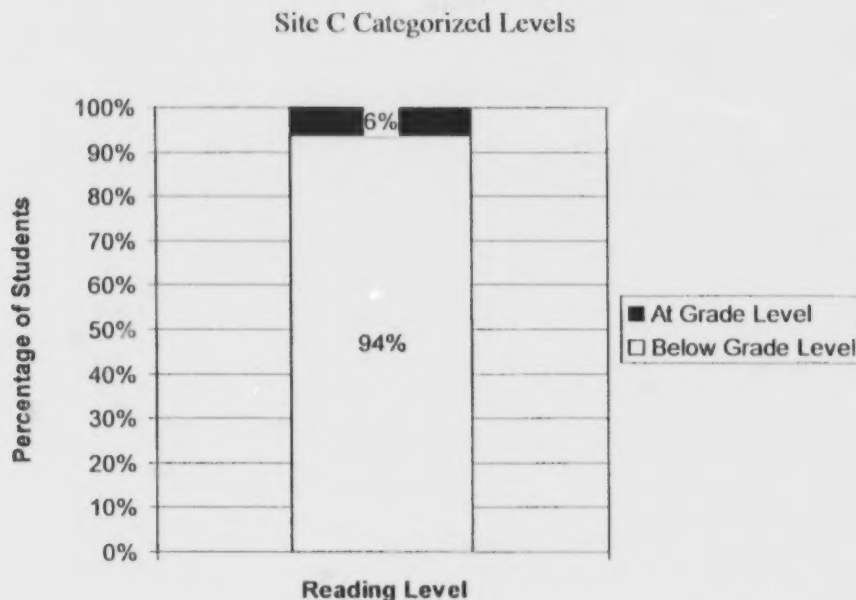


Figure 6. Percentages of students reading above, at, or below grade level according to the DRA pre-test (September 2002).

At site C, a third grade classroom, 6% of the students were “at grade level,” and 94% of the students were “below grade level.” The student considered “at grade level” read at level thirty. The students who were “below grade level” read at levels ten through twenty-four. No students read “above grade level,” one student read “at grade level,” and fifteen students were reading “below grade level.”

To assess students’ comprehension, the examiners listened to the retelling of the story. The story overview, printed on the observation guide, was used to underline statements, ideas, actions, or events related to the story that the student recalled. The examiner checked prompts to show how much support was given during the retelling. Using this information, the examiner rated the students on a scale of one to four on the DRA Comprehension Rubric. One point was given for little or no information, and four was given for very good information. The six categories on the rubric included telling events and key facts, recalling important details from the

text, referring to characters, responding with literal interpretation, and providing responses to teacher questions and prompts. The number of teacher prompts that were recorded determined the final category on the rubric. The more prompts needed, the lower the score. Totaled scores of 16 through 21 were considered "Adequate Comprehension," while totaled scores of 22 through 24 were considered "Very Good Comprehension." Students must have obtained a total score of 16 or higher on the Comprehension Rubric, or they were retested at a lower level. Comprehension levels are illustrated in Figures 7 through 9.

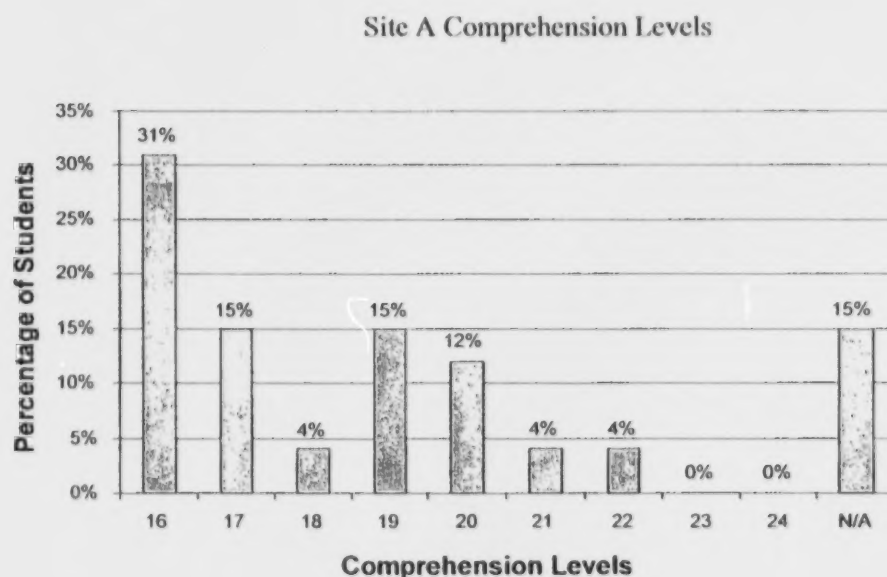


Figure 7. Percentages of students at each comprehension level.

At Site A, a first grade classroom, there were 31% of the students at comprehension level 16, 15% of the students at comprehension level 17, 4% of the students at comprehension level 18, 15% of the students at comprehension level 19, 12% of the students at comprehension level 20, 4% of the students at comprehension level 21, 4% of the students at comprehension level 22, 0% of the students at comprehension levels 23 and 24, and 15% of students did not have a

comprehension level available. This is due to the fact that in DRA test levels A through 2, students were asked to locate a word and letters rather than retell the story. In DRA levels 3 and above the students retold the story and the examiner used the DRA Comprehension Rubric. Sixty-two percent had an "Adequate Comprehension" level. Thirty-eight percent had a "Very Good Comprehension" level.

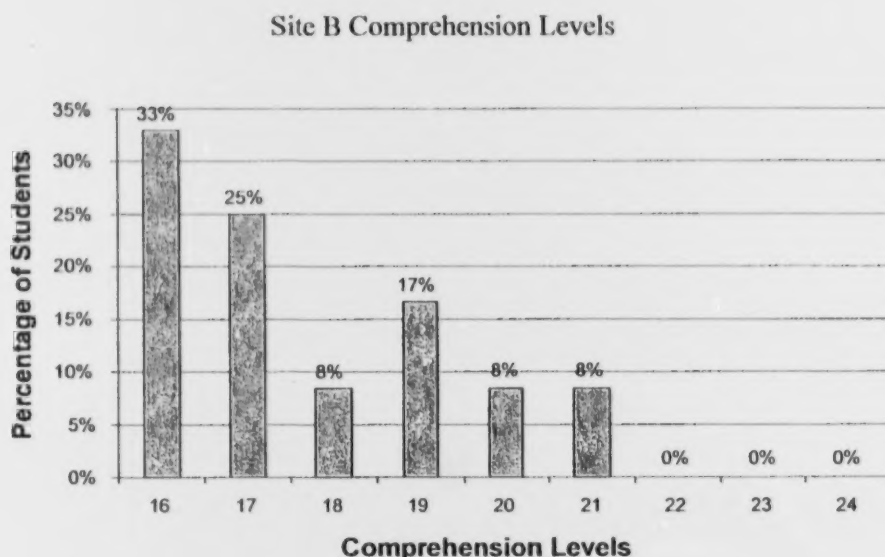


Figure 8. Percentages of students at each comprehension level.

At Site B, a third grade classroom, there were 33% of the students at comprehension level 16, 25% of the students at comprehension level 17, 8% of the students at comprehension level 18, 17% of the students at comprehension level 19, 8% of the students at comprehension level 20, 8% of the students at comprehension level 21, and 0% of the students at comprehension levels 22 through 24. All students achieved the "Adequate Comprehension" level. No students obtained the "Very Good Comprehension" level.

Site C Comprehension Levels

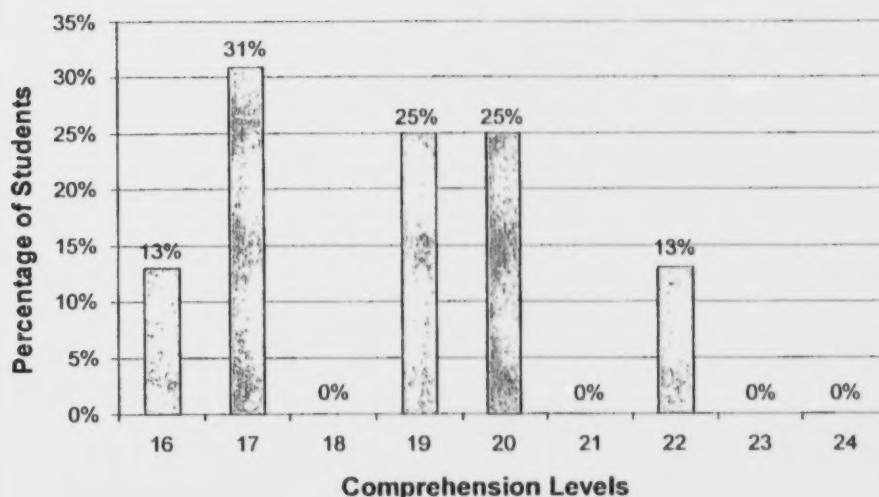


Figure 9. Percentage of students at each comprehension level.

At Site C, a third grade classroom, there were 13% of the students at comprehension level 16, 31% of the students at comprehension level 17, 0% of the students at comprehension level 18, 25% of the students at comprehension level 19, 25% of the students at comprehension level 20, 0% of the students at comprehension level 21, 13% of the students at comprehension levels , 0% at comprehension levels 23 and 24. 87% of the students achieved the "Adequate Comprehension" level, and 13% achieved the "Very Good Comprehension" level.

Probable Causes

The probable causes at the individual sites reflect the probable causes found in the literature review. In defining the reasons for ineffective reading, four specific areas present themselves; poor fluency, lack of motivation, insufficient phonemic awareness, and minimal literacy experiences.

Many reading researchers agree that fluency is an essential reading skill for successful reading. Fluency is the ability to project the natural pitch, stress, and juncture of the spoken word on written text, automatically and at a natural rate (Richards, 2000). Reading dysfluency causes reading to occur at a slower rate suggesting that students may be putting effort in naming words instead of comprehension, the overall text. Research done over the past 60 years concludes that faster readers usually have better comprehension, and are more proficient readers (Rasinski, 2000). The problem is that many students at sites A, B, and C are not fluent readers. In fact the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 44% of a representative sample of the nation's fourth graders were low in fluency. The study also found a close correlation between fluency and reading comprehension. Students with low fluency scores also scored lower on measures of comprehension, suggesting that fluency is a neglected reading skill in our Nation's classrooms affecting student comprehension (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2001).

Student motivation is another determining factor to school success. While motivation would vary for the struggling student and the non struggling student, it continues to play a role in student achievement in schools today. When learning is difficult, students need to put forth greater effort and be more persistent than when learning is easy. Thus, motivation to learn, or, the "continuing impulse to learn," (Oldfather, 2000) is essential. Motivation may decrease when the learning increases in difficulty. Students may be intrinsically motivated, extrinsically motivated, or simply lack the motivation or desire to achieve in school for various reasons. Reasons for students lacking motivation include: poor attitude towards school, minimal parental expectations or involvement, negative peer relationships, and low self aspirations and self esteem. A student who finds learning to be difficult is more likely to lack the continued desire to learn.

There is a focalization of research directing teachers to understand the critical role of decoding skills and their effects in quality reading. Phonemic awareness is the ability to take words apart, put them back together again, and make new words. A child's level of phonemic awareness is a good indicator of beginning reading success. Phonemic awareness is often developed during a child's pre-school years as they are exposed to nursery rhymes, Dr. Seuss books, and chants. Phonological processing for beginning readers is the ability to decode a word, segment it into sounds, and blend the sounds to read and recognize the word. Some research has concluded that because phonological-processing deficits may directly effect reading problems, the diagnosis of reading disabilities can occur on the basis of insufficient phonological-processing skills alone, without regard to intellectual ability (Siegel 1989a, 1989b, 1992 & Stanovich, 1991). Children with a reading disability have displayed a deficit in their ability to differentiate and segment sounds when breaking down a word. "If their sound-based representations are not precise and well specified, beginning readers are clearly at a significant disadvantage when acquiring the alphabetic principle and acquiring and retaining spelling-to-sound relationships" (Lovett, et al., 2000, p.459). Furthermore, success in early reading is dependent upon achieving a certain level of phonological awareness.

Effective reading instruction is built on a foundation that recognizes that ability is determined by multiple factors. Adequate initial reading instruction requires that children have frequent and intensive opportunities to read outside of school, sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts, sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting. Disruption in normal reading development increases the possibility that reading will be delayed. The association of poor reading outcomes

with poverty and minority status no doubt reflects the accumulated effects of several of these risk factors, including lack of access to literacy.

Families differ in the level to which they provide a supportive environment for a child's literacy development. The home literacy environment influences the child's degree of risk. Hess and Holloway (1984) identified five areas of family functioning that influence reading development. They are the value placed on literacy, expectations for achievement, availability and use of reading materials, reading with children, and opportunities for verbal interactions. Adults who interact regularly with children can greatly influence the quality of their literacy experience (Snow, et al., 1998, p.121).

In conclusion the probable causes that are supported by a review of the literature include poor fluency, lack of motivation, insufficient phonemic awareness, and minimal literacy experiences. Each cause exists at all sites in this study. However, the degree to which each cause influences reading achievement varies from site to site.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A variety of solutions have been found for students exhibiting ineffective reading skills. The solutions can be categorized in three different areas; school restructuring, classroom strategies, and program implementation.

Reducing class size would appear like a logical solution for boosting student achievement although research proves otherwise. Having a lower student-to-teacher ratio seems to allow for more time spent on reading, lesson format and student-teacher interactions. There has been much interest on a national level in the relationship between class size and achievement. A Tennessee state-sponsored study of reduced class sizes in the early grades of high poverty schools concluded that significantly reducing the class size to 21 or fewer students with one teacher had positive effects on reading achievement at the end of first grade, although the effects were both small and short term (as cited in Snow, 1998). Both the quantity and quality of teacher-student interactions are necessarily limited by large class size, however best instructional practices take precedent over the number of teacher-student interactions. "Class size reduction efforts must be accompanied by professional development and planning that supports the desired changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (Snow, et al. 1998, p. 230).

Tracking is another widely used solution intending to meet the needs of diverse learners. Tracking occurs in schools when students of similar achievement levels are assigned to the same teacher for all or part of the day. The use of this potential solution seems logical, but is flawed. Proponents of tracking believe that because not all children will learn at the same rate, this solution will allow the teacher to focus on the needs of students of the "same ability" while other learner's needs are being met. This way the average students will not have to be held back while the low ones are taught and the high ones have a chance to be enriched. Tracking is a much better solution in theory than research implies. The research on tracking suggests that it makes no difference for average children, that there are a few advantages and disadvantages for those placed in the top track, and that it is harmful for children placed in the bottom track. Many times in tracking the students who have the greatest need get the least experienced teacher. Allington (1991) states that "children who are placed in the bottom group in first grade generally remain there throughout their elementary school careers and almost never learn to read and write up to grade-level standards" (p.9). Once placed in the low track students usually become low achievers due to the self-fulfilling prophecy. Finally, the way students were assigned to their tracks must be taken into consideration. Some students are not good test takers, some do not work hard to get the grades they could earn and do not achieve what they are capable of, and some have disruptive behaviors that make teachers think they are not capable learners therefore students may be inaccurately placed.

Retention is often used as a solution for low student achievement. According to Cunningham and Allington "Retention is the oldest unsuccessful solution for the unsuccessful reader" (1999, p.5). Many times after a student has been retained it appears that they are doing much better and that the retention has helped. However in years to follow retained students are

among the lowest achieving. As a result children who are retained have lower self-esteem and may view retention as a punishment. Alternatives such as remedial help, summer school, and peer tutoring are more effective than retention and cost the district less. The cost of retention can range anywhere from \$3, 500 to \$7,000 depending on the district. We do not believe that retention is positive for children. Studies suggest that children should be kept with their peers. Retention alone is not a solution for struggling readers, but a well-designed instructional intervention that addresses the student's difficulty is more beneficial.

There is much debate about the role phonics should play when teaching reading. Throughout American educational history the phonics approach was considered the answer to teaching children to read. Although there is controversy in phonics research, there are many proponents of the direct instruction of phonics and "unscientific" assertions that cannot be drawn from available scientific evidence. Some disagreements lie in whether explicit systematic phonics skills be taught isolated from texts, or taught within texts as incidental, opportunistic phonics instruction. At this point there is no convergence of research on just what sort of phonics instruction should be offered. Some phonics programs center instruction on decodable texts. These texts only include words that students have had specific phonics skill lessons to sound out the words. The problem with this practice is that there is no research study that supports the use of decodable text in beginning reading. There is support of texts that are lower in reading level, but none that recommend decodable texts as a solution (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Phonemic Awareness can be connected with phonics and has recently been included in the phonics debate. It is believed that a lack of phonemic awareness is causing a crisis in phonics instruction. Research supports the conclusion that phonemic awareness is an important

understanding in learning to read an alphabetic language because it is the ability to isolate individual sounds in spoken words. It is also indicated by research that most children acquire phonemic awareness by the middle of first grade (Cunningham & Allington). Children who haven't developed phonemic awareness can develop it given proper interventions. No particular instructional materials or methods have been supported by research. Many reading specialists agree that there is a need for effective decoding skills and strategies, but phonics alone cannot take the place of a reading program (Cunningham & Allington).

The whole language approach was introduced in 1987 by the California Language Arts Framework Committee. Whole language teachers stressed comprehension and meaning in the text. They also directed children to use semantic and syntactical clues to decode unknown words. Critics of this approach claim that teachers were not instructing students in the areas of phonics and basic language art skills. Whole language proponents emphasized the teaching of phonics and skills in the context of reading whole and predictable texts. Those in support of whole language believed they were reaching the students with the greatest risk of reading failure. They emphasized that children learn to read naturally. To promote reading achievement through whole language type instruction, educators immersed children with real literature and nonfiction books. Most language experts question the notion that children learn to read naturally. Barbara R. Foorman, a professor of educational psychology, offers this explanation, "Humans are biologically specialized to produce language and have done it for nearly 1 million years. Such is not the case with reading and writing. If it were, there would not be illiterate children in the world. Yet, nearly all children in all societies develop a language" (retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/vol-15/26read.h15>).

The foundation of whole language is based on what children already know about reading and writing when they enter school. Children who have had many meaningful language opportunities are more prepared for school. This poses a dilemma for children who have had limited language experiences such as reading stories, role-playing, discussion, and writing. The definition of whole language is complex.

In a whole language classroom, learners are continually supported to purposefully use language to inquire and to construct and evaluate their own understanding of texts and real world issues. Whole language classrooms are student-centered, problem solving, democratic communities where students experience a wide range of literature and literacy experiences. Expectations for high quality work are high and rigorous. Students are decision makers and independent thinkers (Routman, 1997, p.97).

The success of whole language relies heavily on the classroom teacher. Teachers must be knowledgeable in incorporating fiction and nonfiction books by highly acclaimed authors into the curriculum. Teachers must have adequate training and professional development before and during the process of the implementation of a new program. Time must be invested in collaboration with colleagues, reflection of oneself, research of an anticipated theory, and constant monitoring of student performance. As Stan Pogrow (1996) states, "Large-scale reform requires highly specific, systemic, and structural methodologies with supporting materials of tremendously high quality" (p. 52).

The research on whole language is conflicting. Researchers question the effectiveness of whole language for at-risk students who come from literature-deprived homes and demand more explicit instruction. There is no research reported that whole language instruction yielded gains

among children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Another criticism and perhaps most detrimental to the whole language approach is that children taught in this fashion are less motivated to read than children who have been instructed through more traditional methods. However, research yielding positive results in New Jersey at a small urban center and other sites has been noted. In 1996, it was reported that district wide the first graders test scores on the California Achievement Test averaged at the 78th percentile compared to the 34th percentile in 1989 (Flanagan 1996). In support of whole language, Regie Routman (1997) suggests that much of the criticism against whole language is based on insufficient reporting.

Accelerated Reader (AR) is a computer-based reading tool developed by Advantage Learning Systems, which is now known as the School Renaissance Institute. Students begin by taking the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR) Reading Test on the computer to determine their reading ability. The cloze procedure is the only method used in the STAR Test to define their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Students may then choose books within their personal ZPD and take a multiple choice accelerated reading test on the computer to measure their comprehension.

Problems associated with the STAR include the format of the test. Students are given one form of assessment, which will determine their ZPD without any consideration for oral reading comprehension, or teacher observation, yet it claims to be able to identify student's strengths and weaknesses. Lev Vygotsky, (1986) originator of ZPD, rebuked the idea that testing could determine a child's capability because it measures only independent performances while ZPD was intended for independent and assisted ability level.

Complaints of AR include that the readability levels may vary by company and student interest isn't taken into account. Students with little interest sometimes demonstrate low

comprehension and interest in the reading material has a positive impact on comprehension. The test itself confines students to a computer generated multiple-choice format, which doesn't allow for written responses, extension activities, or interaction with the texts. External motivators are frequently incorporated to encourage student participation. Teachers are encouraged to use rewards and point systems. Once these rewards are removed, there is little motivation to read. Research indicates that extrinsic reward systems are ineffective. "Students who are motivated by competitions also show a high degree of reading avoidance, particularly for more difficult reading tasks or reading outside of school requirements" (Baker & Wigfield, 2001, p.73). Advantage Learning Systems claimed that the point system will motivate the average and below average readers and high achievers will excel to higher levels because of the continued recognition. The low ability student will become discouraged if his efforts are not acknowledged and avoid further engagement in reading. In addition the teacher's role provides no direct instruction in reading strategies moreover, the teacher's role is to assure that each student is reading an appropriate book within his/her ZPD. Advantage Learning Systems suggest that increased reading practice time is crucial to reading achievement. "Furthermore research studies of the effectiveness of reading practice time programs have shown that students achieve at higher rates when the free reading time is combined with direct instruction in reading strategies and with reading extension activities" (as cited in Biggers, 2001, p.74).

Reading Recovery is an early intervention program developed by Marie Clay in 1979. The purpose of this program is to bring the lowest readers in first grade to the average of their class in 12 to 16 weeks. The selection process includes teacher recommendation, The Observation Survey, and the assessment tool of Reading Recovery. A trained professional pulls the four lowest students out for one-on-one instruction 30 minutes each day. Instruction

involves a lesson framework consisting of five components; reading familiar stories; taking a running record from the previous day; manipulating letters; writing, cutting up and reassembling a sentence; and reading a new book. The success of this program is contingent on the explicit instruction of the reading professional (Barnes, 1997). Research has proven that almost all students with Reading Recovery instruction will read on grade level within the semester (Hall, Prevatte, & Cunningham, 1993). Reading Recovery is an expensive program due to individual tutoring, however the gains from this program could be more cost effective than retention or special education referrals (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

The problems with this instruction lie in the rigid program outline. No student-reflection time is allowed and according to Short and Burke, (1991) reflection brings increased flexibility as a problem solver (Barnes, 1997). Short and Burke go on to suggest that the ability to reflect is inhibited when children are not part of a learning community where different perspectives are presented and in Reading Recovery children only hear the teacher's perspective. Some of the components of Reading Recovery include tedious amounts of paperwork such as an attendance record, written analysis of the child's strength and problem areas, a written "Predictions of Progress" that states long and short term goals, a daily lesson plan analysis, a daily running record in which children's miscues are analyzed, a weekly update of book-level progress, a weekly update of written vocabulary words, and a list of books introduced at each session with the results of the running record on each book. The five components of this framework must be accomplished within 30 minutes.

Robert Slavin, Nancy Madden, and a team of developers from John Hopkins University developed a school-wide reform known as Success for All (SFA) in 1986. The early intervention program was designed to meet the needs of students who were at risk for early reading failure.

Key components of this program include: scripted reading and language arts lessons, individualized tutoring, cooperative learning, reading at home every evening, homogeneous grouping and quarterly assessments. School staffs receive extensive training while the school undergoes complete restructuring. SFA personnel monitor and report the school's progress along with consultants from the foundation. Implementation costs for SFA are estimated to range between \$261,060 and \$646,500 per school (King, 1994). A family support team that includes a social worker and a parent liaison are assigned to each school. Critical aspects of Success for All include instruction delivered at ability levels and an established support team to prevent children from falling "through the cracks." This research-based program has generated conflicting findings.

Slavin (1992) reports SFA significantly improves reading achievement especially in the lowest 25% of the class, however, Venezky (1997) found that children fall increasingly behind the national norms and produced no further gains after first grade. Ross and Smith (1994) found similar results in an independent study. A criticism of the SFA program is that it relies heavily on it's own research. In addition, students who are on grade level or above may find the lessons of SFA limiting and repetitious. Considering the cost of implementing Success for All, schools might want to consider other interventions to improve student performance and focus on helping teachers improve the quality of their work with all students (Darling- Hammond, 1997; Pogrow, 2000).

Teachers are continuously searching for intervention strategies to implement in their classrooms. Individual student needs are evident, but teachers do not know how to meet the needs of all their students using one instructional method. According to Cunningham and Hall (1998) "Children do not all learn in the same way and consequently, approaches with particular

emphases are apt to result in some children learning to read, and others not" (p. 652). The Four Blocks method created by Patricia Cunningham and Dorothy Hall, is a systematic, multilevel framework designed for children with a vast range of abilities. Its design uses a wide variety of instructional techniques that allow teachers to avoid ability grouping. The framework is comprised of the combination of four historical approaches to reading instruction; guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. The program focuses on decoding and comprehension, and does not explicitly target critical literacy skills.

The Four Blocks literacy framework began in a first grade classroom during 1989-1990. The framework was developed as the year progressed with two major goals in mind. To provide readers with instruction with the four major approaches to learning to read and to provide instruction that met the needs of children with various literacy levels. The first year was great. The International Reading Association announced the need for multiple approaches for beginning readers recently in a position statement.

During the 1990-1991 school year, 16 first-grade teachers used the Four Blocks framework. The next year, teachers and children in grades two and then grade three used Four Block. Results from two schools-one with a varied population and one serving mostly low-income children indicated that most of the first and second graders read on or above grade level. Ninety percent of the first graders in the varied population school and 57% of the first graders in the high-poverty school read at or above grade level. For second graders who had two years of Four Blocks instruction, 97% of second graders in the varied population school and 83% of the second graders in the high-poverty school read at or above grade level. (Hall, Prevatte & Cunningham, 1995) As the framework became popular in other districts, data was available from

other sites. Data showed that the framework helped many children achieve grade-level or above. As a result, teachers in different schools can use the framework with a variety of children.

The four blocks, Self-Selected Reading, Guided Reading, Writing, and Working with Words, represent four different approaches to teaching children to read. Daily instruction in all four blocks allows many opportunities for children to learn to read and write. Teaching all four blocks provides instruction for children who do not learn in the same way and offers instruction for whatever learning personality a child has. The other difference between children, their different literacy levels, is addressed by using a variety of activities to make each block as multilevel as possible, providing support for children who struggle and challenges for those who need it.

The Four Blocks framework has various methods, however there are two basic principles which must be remembered if instruction can be called Four Blocks. First, because children learn to read in different ways, each block gets 30-40 minutes of instruction each day. Equal time to each block allows children the same opportunity to become good readers, regardless of which approach is best for their individual learning style. Secondly, children are not put in fixed ability groups, and instruction is multilevel so that average, struggling, and excelling students all learn to read and write to their potential.

The Guided Reading Block builds comprehension and fluency in reading and introduces many types of literature, informational texts, and poetry. The lessons have three phases, before reading, during reading, and an after-reading phase. Teachers help students build prior knowledge, make predictions, and set purposes for their reading, before reading. During reading, children make connections to their own experiences, develop vocabulary, make predictions, and

set purposes for their reading. After reading, children connect new knowledge to what they knew before, revisit predictions, and discuss reading strategies.

In Four Blocks classrooms, children read the selections in different ways. For instance, the class reads together, or they do shared reading, choral reading, echo reading, or "Everyone Read To..." (Appendix C) to encourage participation. On other days, the children may read the selection in partners, playschool groups, book club groups, or think-aloud groups. Sometimes, teachers form small groups to coach, while others read with partners or alone. The goals of this block are to develop comprehension skills and strategies, develop background knowledge, meaning vocabulary, and oral language. Also, to introduce all types of literature, to offer instructional-level reading, increase motivation and self-confidence for struggling readers. As they read material at their instructional level they receive support as needed.

The Writing Block includes self-selected writing, topics chosen by children, and focused writing, where they learn to write specific forms and on specific topics. Children use process writing to revise their first drafts. The Writing Block begins with a 10-minute mini-lesson, where the teacher writes and models what writers do. Next, children write. Students may be at various stages of the process, finishing a piece, starting a new piece, editing, or illustrating. The teacher coaches with students who are getting ready to publish. This block ends with "Author's Chair" where students share their work. The goals of the Writing Block are to have students view writing as a way of telling about things, to teach students to use grammar and mechanics, while learning to read through writing and motivate struggling writers. Writing is multilevel because children choose their topics, whatever each child can write is accepted, and students work on their writing as long as they need. Teachers help children publish the work they have chosen and "individualize" their instruction. The child's work usually reveals both what the

child needs to move on and what the child is ready to understand. The writing conference provides the "teachable moment," in which all students can be moved forward in their development.

In the Working with Words Block, children learn to read and spell high-frequency words and patterns that help them decode and spell. The first 10-15 minutes of this block are given to the Word Wall words (Appendices D & E). Students practice new and old words daily by, saying them, chanting the letters, writing the words, and self-correcting the words with the teacher. The remaining 15-25 minutes are spent decoding and spelling. Different activities are used on different days. The goals of the Working with Words Block are to teach children to read and spell high-frequency words, to teach children how to decode, spell lots of words using patterns from words they know. Also, students learn to use phonics and spelling patterns in their reading and writing. Activities in the Working with Words Block are multilevel. While practicing the Word Wall, children are learning to spell, and others who require lots of practice are learning to read them. Lessons begin with short, easy words and then longer, more advanced words. Phonemic awareness is developed when they choose which words rhyme and stretch out. Sorting words into patterns, and then reading and spelling new words is included in each lesson. Children can see how they can use patterns in words to read and spell other words. They learn that rhyming words usually have the same spelling pattern. Teachers provide review for beginning letter sounds for students who need it.

Self-Selected Reading is when children read materials that they choose. The Self-Selected Reading Block begins with a teacher read-aloud. Next, children read what they have chosen, which makes it multilevel. While the children read, the teacher talks with individuals about their books. During the weekly conferences (Appendix F), students are supported in their

book choices and teachers receive information about their development. Children share what is read. The goals of this block are to expose children to all types of literature, to increase children's reading interests, offer instructional-level reading, and build intrinsic motivation.

The comprehensiveness and flexibility of the Four Blocks design also increases its acceptability in diverse kinds of school systems. Since, the program is not a school-wide restructuring intervention with staff development; it is considerably less expensive than other programs. No professional development program is available; therefore, implementation may vary from classroom to classroom. A lack of a parent component limits the reinforcement of skills taught (St. John and Bardzell, 1999). Each component within the four blocks has sufficient research to prove effectiveness, although the program as a whole has not been scientifically proven because of the lack of staff development and professional training.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the implementation of the Four Blocks Literacy Program during the period of September 16, 2002 through to November 21, 2002, the first and third grades will increase reading skills in the areas of comprehension, and phonemic awareness, as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes will be necessary:

1. Students will self-select reading materials from the classroom library at their independent reading level and respond to literature experiences through a teacher- student reading conference.
2. The teacher will explain, demonstrate, and support reading strategies with the students using a variety of literature in whole class, small group or partner format.

3. The teacher will describe, model, and support writing activities with the students given a variety of papers, writing instruments, overhead, easel, or chart paper.
4. The teacher will reinforce reading and spelling patterns through instructional activities given a word wall, letter tiles, and pocket charts.

Project Action Plan

The Four Blocks Method provides a balanced framework for literacy instruction for children with various ability levels and learning styles. Following an action plan such as this will create a literacy rich environment, which we believe will improve reading achievement. During weeks 4-14 daily reading instruction will incorporate the four blocks of the literacy program. Each teacher will select specific activities to fulfill requirements of the reading series at each site. Researchers will reflect weekly in a written journal (Appendix G).

Week #1

- The teacher will send a letter home to parents to be signed and returned.
- The teacher will teach the expected classroom procedures for students.

Week #2

- The teacher will teach the expected classroom procedures for students.
- The teacher will administer the Developmental Reading Assessment as a pre-test to each individual student to determine their reading level.

Week #3

- The teacher will teach the expected classroom procedures for students.
- The teacher will continue to administer the Development Reading Assessment.
- As a pre-test to each individual student to determine their individual reading level.
- The teacher will make a class list of reading levels to assist in curriculum planning and establish reading groups.

Week #4-14 Intervention

- I. During the Guided Reading Block the teacher will explain, demonstrate, and support reading strategies with the students daily for 45 minutes.

A. Pre-reading Activities

1. A connection is made to students' personal experiences.
2. A purpose for reading is set by activating prior knowledge.

3. Guided picture discussions, predictions, and vocabulary addressed.
4. Graphic organizers will be established.

B. During Reading Activities

1. Variations such as shared, choral, and echo reading will be used.
2. Students will read individually, with partners, or in small flexible groups.
3. Think alouds, Everyone Read To... , and sticky note reading used.
4. The teacher will monitor student progress with anecdotal notes.

C. After Reading Activities

1. The teacher leads closure activities.
2. Reading strategies shared to illustrate importance.
3. Students will write in response to what they have read.
4. Students will complete graphic organizers.

II. During the Working with Words Block the teacher will reinforce reading and spelling patterns through instructional activities daily for 20 minutes.

- A. Five word wall words will be introduced each week and reviewed daily.
- B. Students will learn spelling patterns in words.
- C. Students will make words by identifying a rhyme.
- D. Students will sort words by with similar letter patterns.
- E. Students will guess covered words using the cloze procedure.

III. During the Self-Selected Reading Block students will select and respond to literature experiences daily for 20 minutes.

- A. The teacher will read a selection to model fluency and intonation.
- B. The student will select a book from various literature forms to read independently.
- C. The teacher will interview four students daily to monitor reading interests.
- D. Students will share orally with the class or respond in journals.

IV. During the Writing Block the teacher will describe, model, and support writing activities with the students daily for 30 minutes.

- A. Mini-lessons will be modeled using real life writing.
- B. Students will edit their writing using an editing checklist.
- C. Students will write on self-generated topics.
- D. Students will conference with the teacher.
- E. Students will work with peers to edit drafts.
- F. Students will share and discuss using the author's chair.
- G. Students will select a draft from their collection to publish.

Week #15-17

The teacher will Administer the Developmental Reading Assessment as a post-test to each individual student to determine their reading level.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) will be administered to all students in the researchers' classrooms at sites A, B, and C. The test will be given during the first three weeks of school. A post-test will be administered after the nine weeks of intervention to assess growth. The test administered takes approximately 20 minutes with each student. Assessments are conducted during one-on-one reading conferences as students read self-selected assessment texts. Students select a text that seems just right for them from a range of three books chosen by the teacher. The DRA assesses students' ability to preview texts and predict what might happen. As students read orally, the teacher will analyze and record the students' oral reading and observable reading behaviors. Teachers will analyze the students' miscues on the running record of oral reading. Teachers record students' miscues including substitutions, omissions, and insertions as well as repetitions and self-corrections. Totaling the number of miscues determines the students' accuracy rate. During oral reading the teacher also will analyze student pace, phrasing, fluency, intonation, and attention to punctuation. Teachers note observable reading behaviors such as rereading, searching the pictures, appealing for help, sounding out clusters of letters, and self-correcting as evidence of students' use of various strategies. To assess the level of comprehension, the students are asked to retell the story they have just read and respond to teacher prompts and questions. A comprehension rubric is used to determine a student's level of comprehension. Students are then identified as having very little comprehension, some comprehension, adequate comprehension, or very good comprehension.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase reading skills in the areas of comprehension and phonemic awareness. In order to achieve the objective, the researchers chose the Four Block Literacy Method, which incorporated Self-Selected Reading, Guided Reading, Writing, and Working with Words. Evidence of growth over the 10-week period was documented from the Developmental Reading Assessment pre-test and post-test. Prior to beginning the research, a parental consent form (Appendix H) was given. Some students in the research classes at Sites B and C were eliminated from participation because no parental consent was given.

During the first three weeks, procedures were established in the researchers' classrooms. Beginning week 4, the DRA pre-test was given to each individual student to determine their reading level. In weeks 4 through 14, the researchers planned their reading lesson using the Four Blocks Framework. Daily instruction in all four blocks allowed multi-leveled opportunities for children to learn to read and write. In the Guided Reading Block, students were introduced to a variety of pre-reading, during reading, and after reading activities. Teachers helped students build prior knowledge, make

predictions, and set purposes for their reading. This was implemented through picture walks, graphic organizers, and KWL charts. Anticipation guides were used to introduce vocabulary. Students had to prove whether prewritten statements were true about the story. Students read a paragraph with covered words and made guesses using context clues, word length or beginning and ending sounds. Rivets, another vocabulary game similar to hangman, encouraged students to guess the possible word or predict how it was going to be used in the story.

During reading, the students made connections to their own experiences, developed vocabulary, made predictions, and set purposes. Think-alouds were used to model what a good reader might be thinking while reading. Students read their basal story in the following ways, shared reading, partner reading, and choral reading. Leveled books were used in small groups to develop and reinforce comprehension skills.

After reading, the students connected new knowledge to their previous knowledge, revisited predictions, and discussed reading strategies. Students used story maps (Appendices I –K) to organize information from the story they read. Beach balls, with questions written on them, were used to help students verbalize their understanding of the story elements and structure. Written responses were recorded in reading logs (Appendix L) and journals.

The goals of the Working With Words Block were to teach students to read and spell high-frequency words, how to decode, and spell many words using patterns from the words they knew. Five high frequency words were introduced weekly and added to the word wall. Students wrote, chanted, and made riddles with the words. Games included "What Looks Right?," "Rounding Up the Rhymes," "Mind Reader," "Using

Words We Know," "Word Sorts and Hunts," and "Wall Wordo" to identify word patterns (Appendices M-R).

During the Self-Selected Reading Block, the students were exposed to a variety of literature during the daily read aloud. Following the read aloud, students were encouraged to select a book at their independent reading level. Then the teacher conferenced with them about what they were reading.

In the Writing Block, a mini lesson was presented on the overhead. Then students wrote on the topic. The teacher held a conference with students about their writing. After students edited their paper, the sessions ended with students sharing their papers orally in the "Author's Chair." At Site B, the Writing Block was not included due to the departmentalization structure of subjects.

During the fifteenth through seventeenth weeks, the DRA posttest was given to the students. During the oral reading assessment, the students' reading levels were determined by the accuracy and fluency of their oral reading and their ability to retell the story elements and supporting details.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

At sites A, B, and C students' DRA pre- and post-test scores were taken from their DRA Observation Guide. A students' DRA level was determined by acquiring a 94% or above accuracy rate and an "adequate" or "very good" comprehension level. The DRA level is a composite score which indicates the students' independent reading level. Scores for each student were recorded on a matrix. Scores were then grouped in ascending order as illustrated below in Figures 10 through 13.

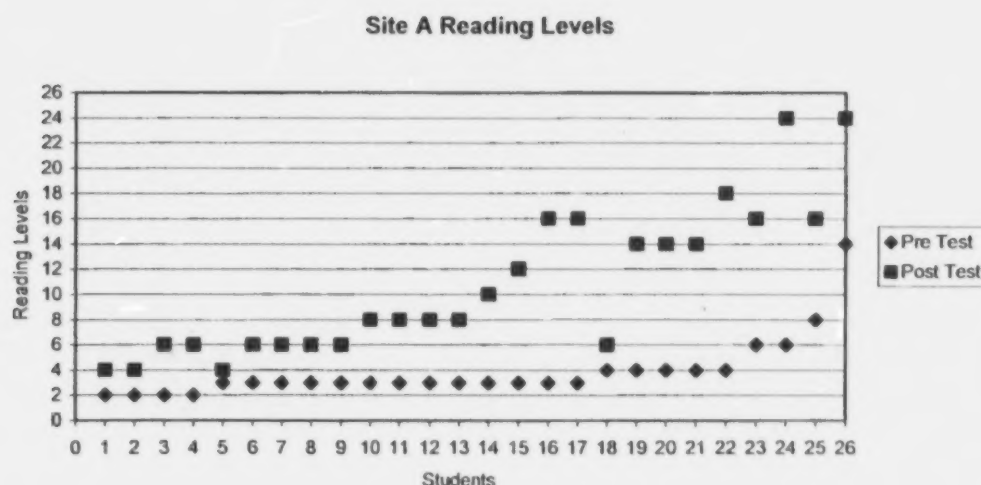


Figure 10. Reading levels for students at Site A as determined by the DRA pre- and post-test. (September 2002, December 2002).

At Site A, a first grade classroom, pre-test scores ranged from reading levels 2 through 14, with 6 different reading levels represented. Post-test scores ranged from reading levels 4 through 24, with 9 different reading levels represented. The pre-test mean was level 4, the post-test mean was level 10 which was an increase of 6 levels. The pre-test median was level 3, the post-test median was level 8 which was an increase of 5 levels. The pre-test mode was level 3, the post-test mode was level 6 which was an increase of 3 levels. The total number of reading levels increased from the pre-test to the post-test per 26 students was 177 levels, averaging 7 levels per student. The range of levels increased spanned from one level to 18 levels. All 26 students participated in this action research.

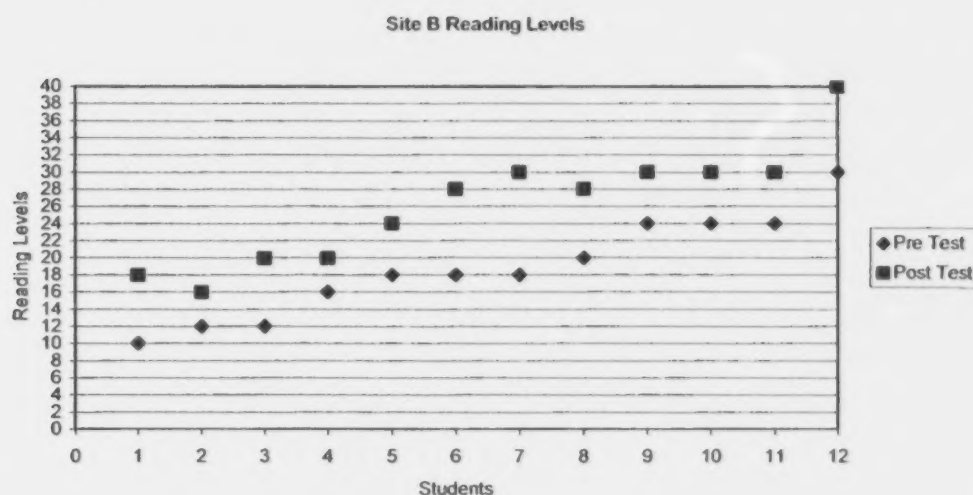


Figure 11. Reading levels for students at Site B as determined by the DRA pre- and post-test. (September 2002, December 2002).

At Site B, a third grade classroom, pre-test scores ranged from reading level 10 through 30, with 7 different reading levels represented. Post-test scores ranged from reading levels 16 through 40, with 7 different reading levels represented. The pre-test mean was level 18, the post-test mean was level 26 which was an increase of 8 levels. The pre-test median was level 18, the post-test median was level 28 which was an increase of 10 levels. The pre-test mode was level 18 and 24, the post-test mode was level 30. The total number of reading levels increased from the pre-test to the post-test per 12 students was 88 levels, averaging 7 levels per student. The range of levels increased spanned from 4 levels to 12 levels. Only twelve out of eighteen students participated in this action research.

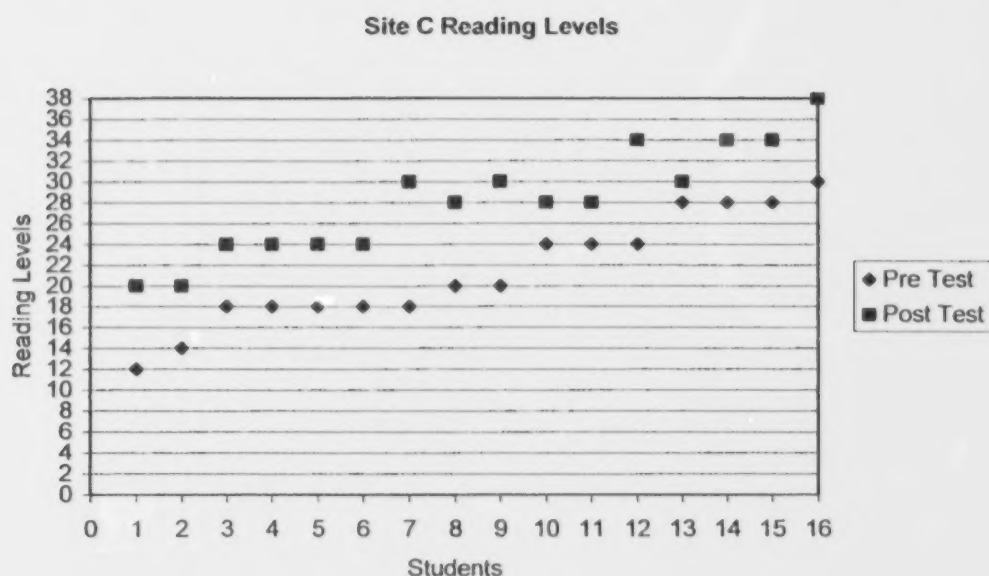


Figure 12. Reading levels for students at Site C as determined by the DRA pre- and post-test. (September 2002, December 2002).

Site C, a third grade classroom, pre-test scores ranged from reading levels 12 through 30, with 7 different reading levels represented. Post-test scores ranged from reading levels 20 through 38, with 6 different reading levels represented. The pre-test mean was level 21, the post-test mean was level 28 which was an increase of 7 levels. The pre-test median was level 20, the post-test median was level 28 which was an increase of 8 levels. The pre-test mode was level 18, the post-test mode was level 24. The total number of reading levels increased from the pre-test to the post test per 16 students was 108 levels, averaging 7 levels per student. The range of levels increased spanned from 2 levels to 6 levels. Only sixteen out of nineteen students participated in this action research.

To assess the students' comprehension skills, the examiners listened to the students' retelling of the stories. Examiners recorded students' statements about the story

on the story overview printed on the observation guide. The examiner tallied the number of times the student needed prompting to determine how much support was needed during the retelling. Using this information, the examiner rated the students on a scale of one through four on the DRA Comprehension Rubric. One point was given for little or no information, and four was given for very good information. The six categories on the rubric included telling events and key facts, retelling important details from the text, referring to characters, responding with literal interpretation, and providing responses to teacher questions and prompts. The number of teacher prompts that were recorded determined the final category on the rubric. The more prompts needed, the lower the score. Totaled scores of 16 through 21 were considered "Adequate Comprehension," while totaled scores of 22 through 24 were considered "Very Good Comprehension." Students must have obtained a total score of 16 or higher on the Comprehension Rubric, or they were retested at a lower level. Comprehension levels are illustrated in Figures 13 through 16.

Site A Comprehension Levels

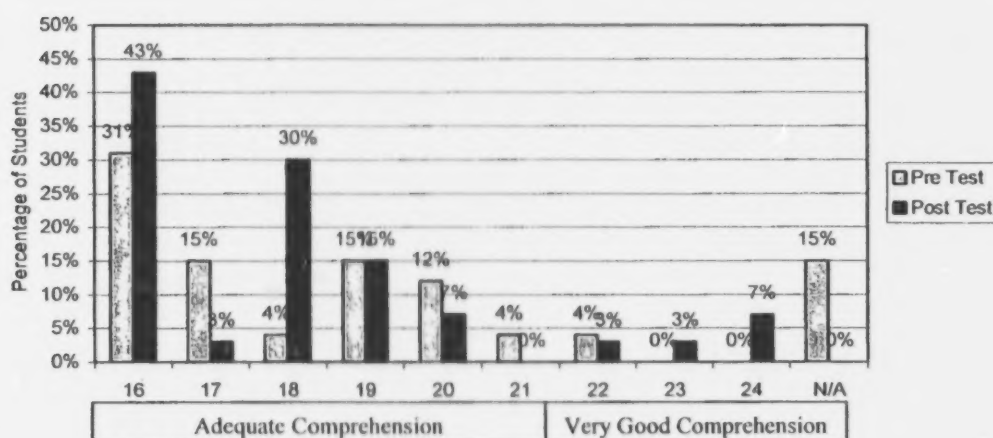


Figure 13. Pre- and post-test percentages of students at each comprehension level.

At Site A, totaled scores of 16 through 21 were considered "Adequate Comprehension," and a combined total of 81% of the students scored in this category on the pre-test, while a combined total of 98% of the students scored in this category on the post-test. This represents a 17% increase in this comprehension level. Totaled scores of 22 through 24 were considered "Very Good Comprehension" and a combined total of 4% of students achieved this on the pre-test, while a combined total of 13% of the students scored in this category on the post-test. This represents a 9% increase in this comprehension level. In the pre-test 15% of the students did not have a comprehension score due to the format of the lower level assessments.

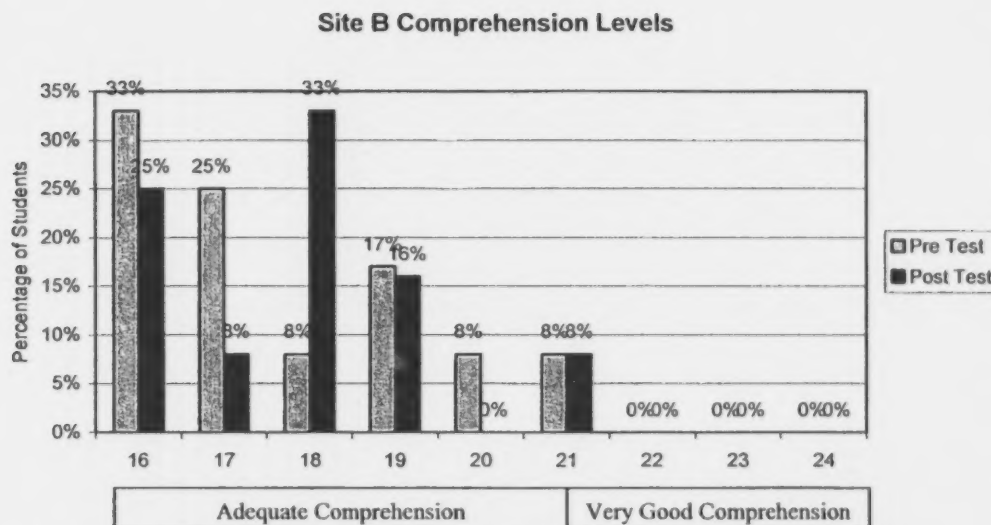


Figure 14. Pre- and post-test percentages of students at each comprehension level.

At Site B, a third grade classroom, 100% of the students scored in the “Adequate Comprehension” level on the pre-test and the post-test. Totaled scores of 16 through 21 were considered “Adequate Comprehension,” while totaled scores of 22 through 24 were considered “Very Good Comprehension.” While certain comprehension scores within the categories of “Adequate and Very Good Comprehension” levels increased and decreased from the pre- to the post-test, no students moved to the “Very Good Comprehension” level. Comprehension levels decreased at the lower end of “Adequate.” No scores in the “Very Good Comprehension” category were given. No significant comprehension gains surfaced however, students’ reading levels increased.

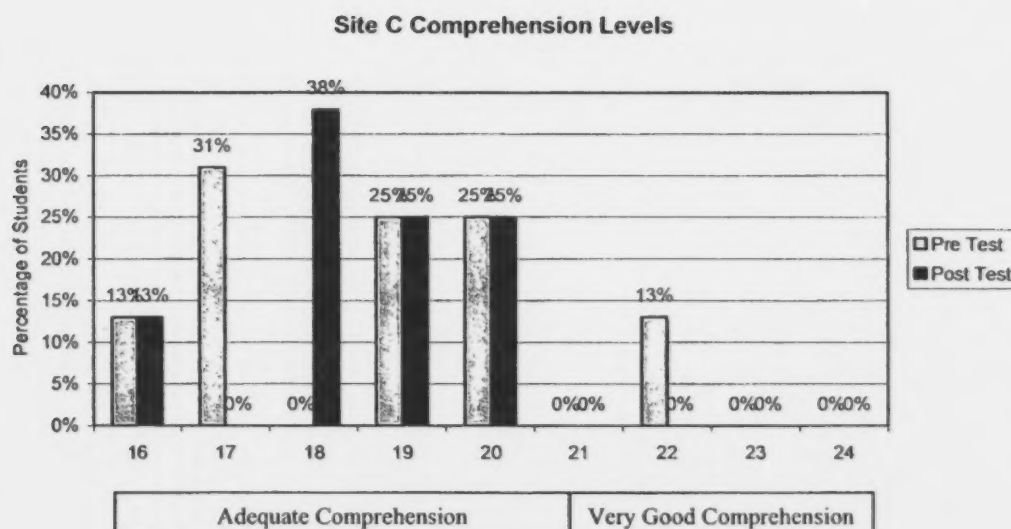


Figure 15. Pre- and post-test percentages of students at each comprehension level.

At Site C, totaled scores of 16 through 21 were considered “Adequate Comprehension,” and a combined total of 94% of the students scored in this category on the pre-test, while a combined total of 100% of the students scored in this category on the post-test. This represents a 6% increase in this comprehension level. Totaled scores of 22 through 24 were considered “Very Good Comprehension” and a combined total of 13% of students achieved this on the pre-test, while 0% of the students scored in this category on the post-test. Although no students advanced to the “Very Good Comprehension” level, comprehension increased in the score of 18 by 38% and scores were maintained at levels 19 and 20.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When assessing the effectiveness of the Four Blocks Framework many positive effects surfaced. At all three targeted primary classrooms involved in this study, there was significant improvement in all the students' literacy skills. The specific teaching of spelling patterns and decoding skills were thought to positively affect the students' overall word knowledge. One possible factor that supports the improvement in the students' overall reading ability at all sites focuses on the increased accessibility of books. During the Self-Selected Reading Block students had books more readily available to them, and they tended to read more, which is a form of practice. The researchers contend that with more practice, the students became better readers.

When analyzing the improvements in the students' reading abilities additional benefits were noted. Students were observed being much more motivated to read. Much of this could be attributed to the high level of success students obtained by reading books at their independent level. The researchers believe that teaching additional reading and comprehension strategies the students began to feel more successful which lead them to be more motivated to read increasingly difficult material. Exposure to various genres on a daily basis increased their familiarity with the world of words and the confidence in their own ability to learn to read. Shared reading and writing activities provided valuable modeling for teaching reading and writing strategies. Individual and small group reading time gave students an opportunity to practice their new independent reading skills.

In making recommendations, the researchers would suggest that the scope of the intervention at all sites be narrowed. Many ideas and plans were included in the Project Action Plan, but it was difficult to actually implement all of the activities planned along

with all the other parts of the curriculum. This was especially true at Site B, where the actual instructional time was only 90 minutes per day. To include art, music, physical education, library, computer lab, math, science, and social studies, along with the planned literacy activities became a challenge. Also, activities were planned with more frequency than was actually possible. Addressing other curricular requirements was the critical factor. Some activities originally planned to be accomplished daily at all sites needed to be adjusted to two or three times a week. Some of the schedule conflicts included times for small groups, assessments, whole class instruction, and student conferences. It would have been more beneficial to plan fewer activities and to do those activities with greater frequency. Repetition and extension of activities greatly increases learning for all students. Due to time constraints, science, social studies, and health were integrated into reading instruction.

The Four Block Framework did not have a standard professional development component. Without this component, researchers inconsistently implemented the program across sites A, B, and C. Because of the lack of a scope and sequence, researchers lacked guidance making their selection of strategies taught. However, the flexibility of the program allowed the researchers to apply this framework to their individual reading series.

We recommend a gradual implementation of the Four Block Framework due to the abundance of information available and the transformation that must take place in the classroom to teach using this method. Overall, when reflecting on the completed study, the researchers strongly encourage their peers to develop and implement the Four Block literacy program at their individual sites.

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Appendix A
Developmental Reading Assessment Observation Guide

DRA Observation Guide

Green Freddie

Level 20

Name _____ Date _____

Teacher _____ Grade _____

Text selected by: ☐ teacher ☐ student

Accuracy Rate _____ Comprehension Level _____ Phrasing and Fluency _____

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT: PREVIEWING AND PREDICTING

T: *In this story, Green Freddie, Freddie was a frog who lived by a pond. He met two friends who made him feel sad. Please read the first page aloud to see what you think might happen in this story.*

Student reads the first page aloud. If it is an appropriate level, continue with the next question.

T: *What do you think might happen in this story?*

Prediction(s)

Student

- ☐ gathers limited information
- ☐ gathers some information
- ☐ gathers pertinent information

- ☐ predicts next possible event or action
- ☐ predicts several possible events or actions with prompting
- ☐ predicts several possible events or actions without prompting

T: *Now it's time to read and enjoy this story by yourself. When you're done, please come to me and I'll ask you to tell me what happened in the story.*

Student reads the rest of the story silently and then gives a retelling with the book closed.

COMPREHENSION AND RESPONSE

Close the book before the retelling and then say:

T: *Start at the beginning and tell me what happened in this story.*

Highlight or underline information included in the student's retelling on the story overview. Please note the student does not need to use the exact words in order for you to underline the statement, idea, action, or event. Place "TP" by information given in response to a teacher prompt.

Characters: Freddie the Frog, squirrel, chipmunk, and owl

Setting/Places depicted in the story: On a log in the pond

STORY OVERVIEW

1. Freddie sat on the log. "He wasn't eating. He wasn't drinking. He wasn't thinking."
2. Squirrel came along and asked Freddie, "Don't you wish you looked like me? My fur is pretty. You're all green."
3. Chipmunk came along and asked Freddie, "Don't you wish you looked like me? My fur is pretty. You're all green."
4. Freddie cried.
5. Wise owl asked why Freddie was crying and then told him that things all around him were green.

Ending: Freddie croaks loudly so everyone can hear green is a great color to be.

Use one or more of the following prompts to gain further information.

1. *Tell me more.*
2. *What happened at the beginning?*
3. *What happened after ____ (an event mentioned by the student)?*
4. *Who else was in the story?*
5. *How did the story end?*

Use these questions only if the following information was omitted from the retelling.

1. *What was Freddie's problem?*
2. *How was Freddie's problem solved?*

Record all other questions asked.

RESPONSE

T: *Why did you choose this story?*

T: *Tell me what you liked about this story.*

T: *What does this story make you think of?*

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The student links to:

- ☐ personal experience
- ☐ other media or events

- ☐ other literature
- ☐ other _____

DRA COMPREHENSION RUBRIC

Circle the number to the left of one statement in each row that best describes the student's retelling. Then add the circled numbers together to obtain a total score. Circle the total score (from 6–24) where it appears in the row of numbers at the top of the rubric to determine the level of comprehension.

Very Little Comprehension 6 7 8 9	Some Comprehension 10 11 12 13 14 15	Adequate Comprehension 16 17 18 19 20 21	Very Good Comprehension 22 23 24
1 Tells 1 or 2 events or key facts	2 Tells some of the events or key facts	3 Tells many events, in sequence for the most part, or tells many key facts	4 Tells most events in sequence or tells most key facts
1 Includes few or no important details from text	2 Includes some important details from text	3 Includes many important details from text	4 Includes most important details and key language or vocabulary from text
1 Refers to 1 or 2 characters or topics using pronouns (<i>he, she, it, they</i>)	2 Refers to 1 or 2 characters or topics by generic name or label (<i>boy, girl, dog</i>)	3 Refers to many characters or topics by name in text (<i>Ben, Giant, Monkey, Otter</i>)	4 Refers to all characters or topics by specific name (<i>Old Ben Bailey, green turtle, Sammy Sosa</i>)
1 Responds with incorrect information	2 Responds with some misinterpretation	3 Responds with literal interpretation	4 Responds with interpretation that reflects higher-level thinking
1 Provides limited or no response to teacher questions and prompts	2 Provides some response to teacher questions and prompts	3 Provides adequate response to teacher questions and prompts	4 Provides insightful response to teacher questions and prompts
1 Requires many questions or prompts	2 Requires 4–5 questions or prompts	3 Requires 2–3 questions or prompts	4 Requires 1 or no questions or prompts

ORAL READING AND STRATEGIES USED

Record the student's oral reading behaviors on the record of oral reading that follows, or take a running record on a blank sheet of paper as the student reads pages 4 and 5. Number the miscues that are not self-corrected.

Page 4

A chipmunk came skipping along. The chipmunk stopped at the pond. She looked at herself in the water, and she smiled. Then she patted her golden-brown fur with her paw. "My fur looks pretty today, doesn't it?" said the chipmunk.

"Yes," said Freddie the Frog. "It looks very pretty."

"Don't you wish you looked like me?" asked the chipmunk.

"No," said Freddie the Frog. "I look OK."

Page 5

"But look at you," said the chipmunk.

"You poor thing. You're all green."

Then the chipmunk skipped away, all shining and golden brown in the sunshine.

Freddie the Frog sat on his log. He wasn't eating. He wasn't drinking. He wasn't thinking. He was crying.

The wise old owl came flying by. He stopped at the pond. He looked at Freddie the Frog.

"Why are you crying, Freddie?" asked the owl. "It's such a pretty day. No one should be crying on such a pretty day."

Circle accuracy rate: Word Count 154

%	100	99	98	97	96	95	94	93	92	91	90	89	88
Miscues	0	1-2	3	4-5	6	7-8	9-10	11	12-13	14	15-16	17	18

Phrasing and fluency

Student reads:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ word by word | ☐ in longer phrases most of the time; adequate rate |
| ☐ in short phrases at times | ☐ in longer phrases; rate adjusted appropriately |
| ☐ in short phrases most of the time | |
| ☐ in longer phrases at times; inconsistent rate | |

Intonation

Student reads with:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ no intonation; monotone | ☐ adjusts intonation to convey meaning at times; attends to punctuation most of the time |
| ☐ little intonation; rather monotone | ☐ adjusts intonation to convey meaning; attends to punctuation |
| ☐ some intonation; some attention to punctuation; monotone at times | ☐ begins to explore subtle intonation that reflects mood, pace, and tension |

At difficulty

Student problem solves using:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ picture | ☐ multiple attempts |
| ☐ letter/sound | ☐ pausing |
| ☐ letter sound clusters | ☐ no observable behaviors |
| ☐ syllables | Appealed for help: _____ times |
| ☐ rereading | Was told/given: _____ words |

Analysis of miscues and self-corrections

Miscues interfered with meaning:

- ☐
- no
-
- ☐
- at times
-
- ☐
- sometimes
-
- ☐
- often

Student:

- ☐
- detects no miscues
-
- ☐
- self-corrects a few significant miscues
-
- ☐
- self-corrects some significant miscues
-
- ☐
- self-corrects most significant miscues
-
- ☐
- self-corrects most significant miscues quickly
-
- ☐
- self-corrects all significant miscues quickly

Comments:

READING PREFERENCES

T: *When do you like to read? Why?*

T: *Tell me how you choose a book to read.*

T: *What is one of your favorite books? Why?*

Circle the statements on the DRA Continuum that best describe the student's observable reading behaviors and responses.

DEVELOPMENTAL READING ASSESSMENT LEVELED TEXTS

LEVELED TEXTS

Grade Level		DRA Text
<u>Kindergarten</u>	A	Can You Sing?
	1	Things That Go
	2	I Can See
<u>Kinder/1st Grade</u>		
Preprimer	3	The "I Like" Game
	4	Where Is My Hat?
	6	Why Are We Stopping?
	8	Duke
Primer	10	Shoe Boxes
	12	Robert's New Friend
Grade 1	14	The Wagon
	16	Pot of Gold
<u>Second Grade</u>	18	A Giant in the Forest
	20	Green Freddie
	24	The Wonderful Day
	28	You Don't Look Beautiful to Me
<u>Third Grade</u>	30	Touchdown!
	34	Be Nice to Josephine
	38	Trouble at Beaver Pond
<u>Fourth Grade</u>	40	Old Ben Bailey Meets His Match
<u>Fifth Grade</u>	44	Danger in the Deep

Name _____

Everyone Read To...



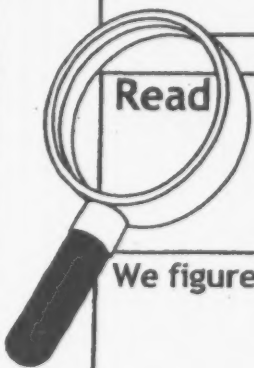
Read to find out...

We found out...



Read to find out...

We found out...



Read to figure out...

We figured out...

Appendix D

Grade One Word Wall List

after	he	said
all	her	saw
am	here	school
and	him	see
animal	his	she
are	house	sister
at	how	some
be	I	talk
best	in	teacher
because	is	tell
big	it	that
boy	jump	the
brother	kick	them
but	like	there
can	little	they
can't	look	thing
car	made	this
children	make	to
come	me	up
day	my	us
did	new	very
do	nice	want
down	night	was
eat	no	we
favorite	not	went
for	of	what
friend	off	when
from	old	where
fun	on	who
get	out	why
girl	over	will
give	people	with
go	play	won't
good	pretty	you
had	quit	your
has	rain	zoo
have	ride	

Appendix E

Grade Three Word Wall List

about	hole	there
again	hopeless	they
almost	I'm	they're
also	impossible	thought
always	independent	threw
another	into	through
anyone	it's	to
are	its	too
beautiful	journal	trouble
because	knew	two
before	know	unhappiness
buy	laughed	until
by	let's	usually
can't	lovable	vacation
city	myself	very
could	new	want
community	no	was
confusion	off	wear
countries	one	weather
didn't	our	went
discover	people	were
doesn't	prettier	we're
don't	prettiest	what
enough	pretty	when
especially	probably	where
everybody	question	whether
everything	really	who
except	recycle	whole
exciting	right	winner
favorite	said	with
first	schools	won
friendly	something	won't
general	sometimes	wouldn't
getting	terrible	write
governor	that's	your
have	their	you're
hidden	then	

Appendix F
Student Reading Conference Questions

Literary element focus: Setting

Student reads:	fluently	word by word	
Student reads with expression:	yes	no	
This book was:	too easy	too hard	appropriate
Where does the story take place?			
Tell me what this place was like.			
When did this story take place?			
Have you ever been to a place like this?			
If not, would you ever like to visit a place like this?			

Literary element focus: Problem/Solution

Student reads:	fluently	word by word	
Student reads with expression:	yes	no	
This book was:	too easy	too hard	appropriate
Who has a problem in this story?			
Describe the problem this character had:			
Was the problem solved?			
How?			
How would you have solved this problem?			

Literary element focus: Plot/Main Idea

Student reads:	fluently	word by word	
Student reads with expression:	yes	no	
This book was:	too easy	too hard	appropriate
How did this story begin?			
What happened in the middle of the story?			
How did this story end?			
Can you think of another way this story might have ended?			

Appendix G
Researchers' Weekly Journal

Week of

Actions Taken:

Reflection:

Pluses (+)	Minuses (-)	Interesting (?)

Appendix H
Teacher Letter from Researchers

Saint Xavier University
Student Consent for Student to Participate in a Research Study
Improving Reading Achievement Through the Use
of a Balanced Literacy Program

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires me to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects my instruction. I have chosen to examine reading skills.

The purpose of this project is to implement the Four Blocks Literacy Program. The goal of the program is to improve your child's reading skills by providing a variety of opportunities for students to read and write.

I will be conducting my project from September 3rd through November 21st, 2002. The activities related to the project will take place during regular instructional delivery. The gathering of information for my project during these activities offers no risks of any kind to your child.

Your permission allows me to include your student in the reporting of information for my project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what I have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at 672-6518.

Sincerely,

Appendix I
Story Map

Name _____

**Story
Structure**

Title: _____

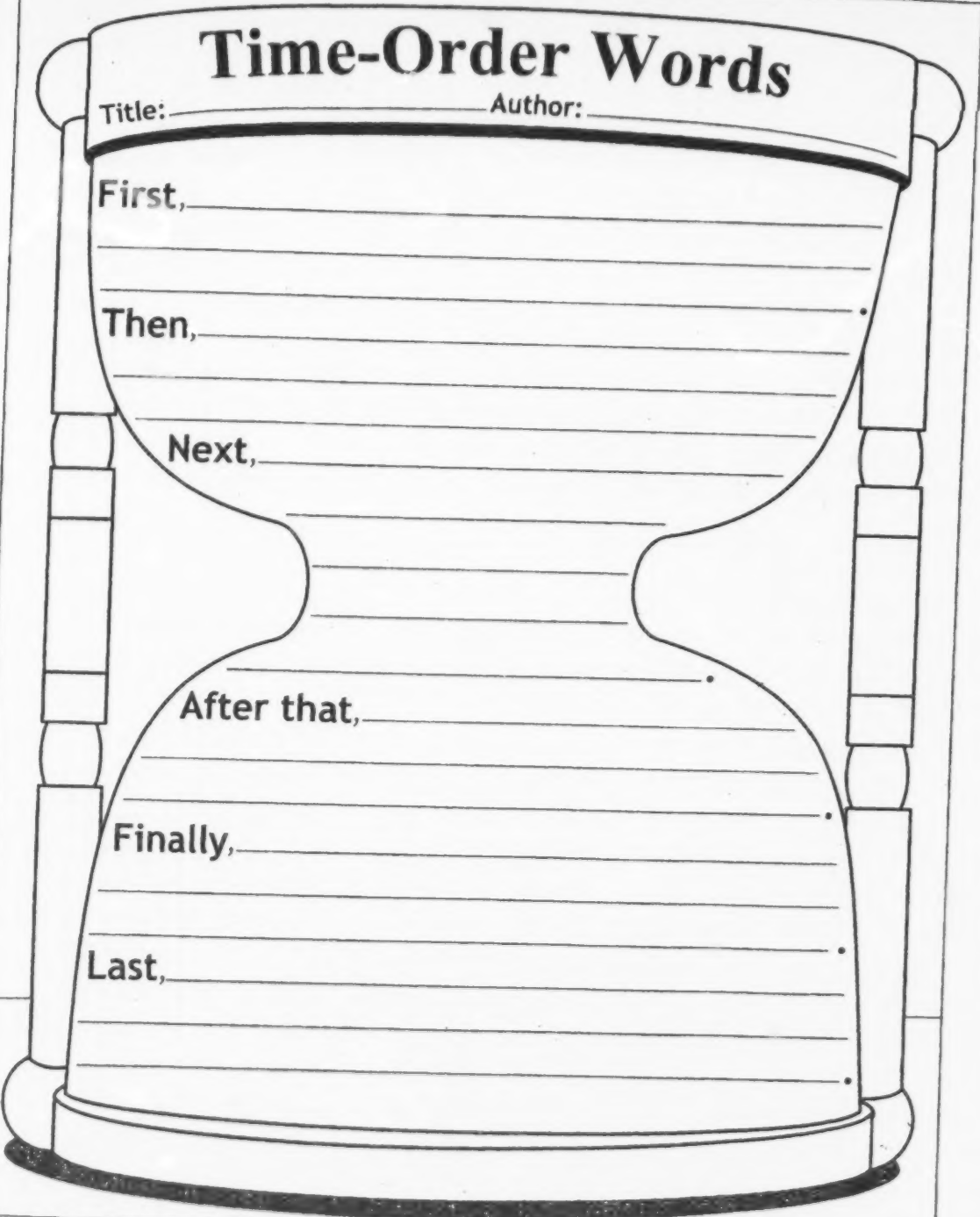
Author: _____

Beginning _____

Middle _____

End _____

Name _____



Time-Order Words

Title: _____ Author: _____

First, _____

Then, _____

Next, _____

After that, _____

Finally, _____

Last, _____

This worksheet is designed as an hourglass shape. The top bulb contains the title 'Time-Order Words' and fields for 'Title' and 'Author'. The narrow middle section has four horizontal lines. The bottom bulb is divided into five sections, each starting with a time-order word: 'First', 'Then', 'Next', 'After that', 'Finally', and 'Last'. Each section has several horizontal lines for writing. The entire form is enclosed in a decorative border that resembles a wooden frame.

Name _____

***What's Cooking?***

Title: _____

Author: _____

Equipment:The setting is _____

_____**Ingredients:**The characters are _____

_____**Mix:**The problem is _____

_____**Bake:**The solution is _____

_____**Serve:**The ending is _____

Appendix L
Reading Log

Name _____

I read _____

It was about _____



Words I Can Now Read and Write

Appendix M
 "What Looks Right?" Activity

Words that have the same spelling pattern usually rhyme. If a reader comes to the unknown words *quail* and *stale*, she can easily figure out the pronunciation associated with other *ail* or *ale* words she can read and spell. The only way to know which is the correct spelling is to write it one way and see if it "looks right" or check the probable spelling in a dictionary. *What looks right?* lessons help students learn to use these two important self-monitoring spelling strategies.

What looks right? lessons should only be used once students are spelling words by pattern rather than in the one-letter-one-sound way used by beginning spellers. If most of the students are still spelling letter-by letter, wait until they are pattern spellers before beginning these lessons.

Here is a description of the steps in an initial *What looks right?* lesson:

1. Write two words which your students can read and spell, and which have the *ale/ail* patterns. For this lesson, use *whale* and *jail*.
2. Have students say these words and notice that they rhyme but that they don't have the same spelling pattern. After writing a little-used word, they look at it to see if it "looks right." If a word doesn't look right, a good speller tries to think of another rhyming word with a different spelling pattern, and writes that one to see if it looks right. If they need to be sure of a spelling they should look the word up in the dictionary.
3. Create two columns on a chart and head them with the words *jail* and *whale* and underline the spelling patterns *a - i - l*, and *a - l - e*. There are many words that rhyme with *jail* and *whale* that you can't tell by just saying a word which spelling pattern it will have. Explain that you are going to say words and write them using both spelling patterns. The students' job is to decide which one looks right and write only that one. They will then find the word they wrote in the dictionary to prove it is correct spelling.

Appendix N
"Rounding Up the Rhymes" Activity

Rounding up the Rhymes is another activity that helps students learn to use patterns to decode and spell hundreds of words. Once all the rhyming words are generated on a chart, students write rhymes using these words and then read each others' rhymes. Because writing and reading are connected to every lesson students learn to use these patterns as they actually read and write.

Here is how to do a Rounding Up the Rhymes Lesson.

1. Create an onset deck of cards with all the beginning sounds. At the beginning of the lesson distribute all the onset cards to the students.
2. Write the spelling pattern with which you are working 10-12 times on a piece of chart paper.
3. Next ask if anyone has a card he thinks will make a word when combined with *and*. Then allow the student to place his card next to the spelling patterns and pronounce the word. If the word is a real word have the students use it in a sentence and then write it on the chart. If the word does rhyme but has a different spelling pattern include it at the bottom of the chart with an *.
4. Once the chart of rhyming words is written, work together in a shared writing format to write a couple of sentences using lots of the rhyming words.
5. Next the students write rhymes. Have students share their work with the class.

Appendix O
"Mind Reader" Activity

To play "Be a Mind Reader" you should have around 70 words on the word wall. In Be a Mind Reader, you think of a word and give students five clues which narrow to only one possible word. Have students number one through five and give five clues such as these:

1. It is one of our word wall words. (To narrow this you can say it is in the first half of the alphabet.)
2. It has four letters.
3. It does not begin with a "w."
4. It does not have any "a's."
5. It fits in this sentence: I want to go to New York _____.

Kids love to be a mind reader and this gives them lots of painless practice!

Appendix P
"Using Words You Know" Activity

All the *Using Words You Know* lessons work in a similar fashion. Here are the steps:

1. Show students three to five words they know and have them pronounce and spell the words.
2. Divide the board or transparency into four columns with *bike, car, van, and train*. Have each student set up the same columns on a piece of paper.
3. Remind students that words that rhyme usually have the same spelling pattern. Underline the spelling pattern at the top of each column.
4. Tell students that you are going to show them some words and that they should write them on their papers under the words with the same spelling patterns.
5. Show them the words which you have written on index cards. Let different students go to the board and write as students write the words in their paper.
6. Explain to students that thinking of rhyming words can also help them spell. This time do not show them the words; say the words instead, then have students decide with which word each new word rhymes and use the spelling pattern to spell it.
7. In this part of the lesson by helping students verbalize that in English, words that rhyme often have the same spelling pattern. Good readers and spellers don't sound out every letter, rather they try to think of a rhyming word and read or spell the word using the pattern in the rhyming word.

Appendix Q
"Word Sorts and Hunts"

Children look at words and sort them into categories based on spelling patterns and sound. Children say the words and look at how they are spelled. The words must sound the same and look the same. When the children are proficient at looking, saying, and deciding, the teacher leads them in some "blind sorting." The teacher calls out the same words but does not show them to the children. Children decide in which column each word should be written before the word is shown. Then the word is written in the correct column.

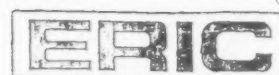
The final stage in developing automatic spelling of certain patterns is the "blind writing" sort. The teacher calls out previously sorted words and children write them in the appropriate columns before seeing them. Then the teacher shows the word to confirm their spelling. Word sorts are flowed by word hunts. Children are encouraged to add words that fit the pattern anytime they find them in their reading. Hunting for words draws children's attention to spelling patterns in the "real" materials they are reading.

Appendix R
"Wall Wordo"

To prepare for this Bingo-type game, create a Bingo grid. Let several students choose and call out words from the word wall until you have a total of 24 words. As each word is called, have students chant its spelling and carefully write it in any squares on the sheet. Tell students that they must write each word correctly because if they win they must have the words written correctly. They will all have the same 24 words, but not in the same places. Where they put the words will determine who wins, not whether they have the words. Once 24 words have been announced, let students cover the words with markers and continue like the game Bingo. When someone completely covers a row they should yell out "Wall Wordo!"



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